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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA  
GROUP IDENTIFICATION AMONG NEGROES: AN EXAMINATION  
OF THE SOUL CONCEPT IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

by



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A THESIS  
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES  
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE  
OF MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT .....SOCIOLOGY.....

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled "Group Identification Among Negroes: An Examination Of The Soul Concept In The United States Of America" submitted by Aubrey W. Bonnett in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.



## ABSTRACT

Soul, in the United States of America, is the American counterpart to the concept of Negritude, a distinct quality of Negro-ness growing out of the Negro experience. It is felt to be an essentially Negro phenomenon in general, and a lower class one in particular. Soul has strong implications of ethnocentrism (race-pride) and has been used - again primarily by lower class Negroes - to build and buttress their group solidarity. In so far as it performs this function, it is not a unique phenomenon but rather another manifestation of group identification, a phenomenon ever present in the history of the Negro minority group in the United States of America.

The history of the Negro in the New World has been characterised by attempts of this group, to deal in a positive manner with their "blackness" and "powerlessness." "Soul", like Négritude in the Caribbean, has attempted to deal with the question of blackness. Unlike Négritude in the Caribbean however, "Soul" has not as yet catered effectively to the question of the powerlessness of the Negro in the United States of America. The writer feels that this has not occurred because of (1) the lack of a leadership infra-structure which would unite the Negro masses and together try to acquire power for the group as a whole, and (2) the intransigence and racist nature of the political system in the United States of America.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The one thing in the world of value, is the active Soul. Emerson-American Scholar.

The writer is most indebted to Dr. Sethard Fisher the chairman of the thesis committee whose patient and friendly assistance was invaluable. The comparative and theoretical side of the thesis was immeasurably strengthened by his thoughtful criticisms and insightful suggestions at every stage of the manuscript. I am also indebted to the two other members of the committee, Professors W. Meloff and R. Pendergast, who made a number of suggestions and whose comments were always a source of encouragement.

Special thanks must also go to the many graduate students in the department of Sociology - especially those who enrolled in Minority Groups Seminar (Sociology 568) - whose comments and suggestions were again of much help during the earlier stages of this manuscript. One name stands out G. Llewelyn Watson - a "Soul Brother." My wife Pamela Audrey, whose interest in the soul phenomenon played no small part in my choosing this topic for research, also the residents of Athabasca Hall graduate residence main floor south wing - Soul Brothers all - were always a constant source of inspiration.

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## CHAPTER I

### THE CONCEPT OF SOUL: ITS EMERGENCE, INTERPRETATION, AND RELEVANCE TO THE SOCIOLOGY OF MINORITY GROUP RELATIONS

#### Introduction to the Study

"I am talking of millions of men who have been skillfully injected with fear, inferiority complexes, trepidation, servility, despair, abasement."

(Aime Cesaire, Discours Sur Le Colonialisme)

The theme of inferiority has always been the most critical in defining the symbolic status of the Negro, and the corollaries of inferiority are group self hatred and low self-esteem. Most psychiatrists, psychologists -- social scientists in general -- would agree that the Negro American suffers from a marred self-image, of varying degree, which critically affects his entire psychological being.<sup>1</sup> It is also a well documented fact that this negative self concept leads to self-destructive attitudes and behavior that hinders the Negro's struggle toward full equality in American life.<sup>2</sup> Civil rights leaders have long been aware of the need to build a positive sense of identity in the Negro masses, although there are widening schisms among these leaders as to how this can best be accomplished.

For the past decades civil rights groups have vigorously pursued the ideal that the integration of Negroes into "all phases of American life" combined with the teaching of a bit of "Negro history" would solve most of the Negro's identity problems. Exceptions have been the Black Muslims and other nationalist groups who have insisted upon separation of the races as the ultimate solution to the racial problem. This controversy



as to strategy has been disturbing particularly for the poor masses of Negroes who feel that the end result will be a greater crisis in identity for them unless there are counter-measures.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, some have advocated "black consciousness" and different forms of racial solidarity as a way to the Negro's eventual psychological and social salvation.

This new surge toward a positive racial identity and enhanced self-esteem took many forms among Negroes. When the late Malcolm X was the most articulate spokesman of the Black Muslim movement he insisted on a Garvey-type deification of the value of being black. Indeed the present tendency on the part of the militant Negro youth to use the term black rather than Negro seems to come directly from the Malcolm X form of Negro assertion of positive racial identity. The struggle towards the affirmation of his humanity also led the American Negro to the vogue of Africanism, that is, to identity as closely as possible with the emerging nations of Africa and the Caribbean. The cult of Negritude, the fact wherein Negro females refuse to straighten their hair as a protest against imitating the hair texture of whites; the tendency of some young Negro males to effect the Afro-haircut must be seen as part of the larger pattern of the present struggle for positive racial identity.<sup>4</sup>

One of the more intriguing facts of the present struggle of the Negro for positive self-esteem is that the struggle is no longer restricted to lower class Negro youth, taking the form of hostility, aggression and delinquency, usually associated with the most oppressed Negro. There are many indications that a substantial proportion of middle and upper class Negro youth have become a part of the pervasive psychological and ideological revolt against American racism and hypocrisy.<sup>5</sup> The development of small groups of Muslim and black nationalist - oriented Negro students





in predominantly Negro colleges, and the increase in the number of Afro-American societies in predominantly white colleges, are examples of a rising pattern of racial assertiveness among Negro college students. At Yale, Harvard, Columbia, and other prestigious institutions Negro students have insisted - at times against the advice of their deans - upon their rights to organise themselves as Negroes, and to discuss among themselves their common problems and aspirations.<sup>6</sup> This is a significant development. It is racial affirmation. It is an indication of the serious struggle for positive racial and self-identity. Above all, it represents a transition from a period of denial to a period of racial affirmation.<sup>7</sup>

In its early treatment among disciplines like philosophy, theology, literature etc., the term Soul often referred to the human Soul. If another kind of Soul was the focus of attention, then invariably a qualifier was used, for example plant Soul, animal Soul etc. There is nonetheless a use of the term Soul that means simply a principle of life, or a source of life's activities. According to this usage, Soul is the mark of a vital living thing, separating the living from the non-living.<sup>8</sup> Soul was almost always associated with the "vitalizing principle," the principle by which a thing is able to perform the activities which we associate with being "alive." It is, essentially, a process of coming alive that we now see emerging in the black ghettos of the United States - but now only in a social sense.

The last few years have witnessed the emergence of a concept of "Soul" as signifying what is "essentially Negro" in the black ghettos of the large cities of the Northern United States. Conceptions of "Soul" currently used have come from writings on the urban black ghetto. The work of three contributors to the study of Soul merits the special attention





of Sociologists; Ulf Hannerz, who in his research on the concept did field work among lower class Negroes in a slum neighborhood in Washington, D.C.<sup>9</sup> Charles Kiel,<sup>10</sup> and Leroi Jones.<sup>11</sup> Of course there are other contributors. Leroy Bennett,<sup>12</sup> Nat Hentoff,<sup>13</sup> Claude Brown,<sup>14</sup> not to mention the various feature editors of popular magazines like TIME, NEWSWEEK, EBONY, ESQUIRE etc., have grappled at one stage or another with this concept. However, the three "core" contributors just mentioned - Ulf Hannerz, Charles Kiel and Leroi Jones adequately encompass the position of the other contributors. At this juncture, therefore, a short review of the theoretical positions of the three core contributors is in order, for basically I shall draw upon their analysis and interpretation, in an effort to posit my own interpretation.

### Review of Main Writings

#### 1. Hannerz

Hannerz's work is entitled "The Rhetoric of Soul: Identification in Negro Society."<sup>15</sup> In that paper, Hannerz attempts to place the concept "Soul" in its social and cultural matrix, in particular with respect to tendencies of social change as experienced by ghetto inhabitants.<sup>16</sup> He states that the concept as it has come to be used in urban ghettos over the last number of years stands for what is the "essence of Negroness" and refers to the kind of "Negroness" with which the urban slum dweller is most familiar -- people like himself. Hannerz sees the choice of the term Soul for this Negroness as being essentially noteworthy for he believes that it shows the influence of religion on lower class Negroes.<sup>17</sup>

Further he sees the connotation of 'the essentially human' to refer to the essentially Negro as the new concept of Soul does, as having strong



implications of ethnocentrism.<sup>18</sup> He feels that the new concept implies that what is "Soul" is not only different from what is not Soul (particularly what is main-stream middle-class America); but it is also superior.<sup>19</sup> In analyzing the various manifestations of Soul, namely, Soul Music, Soul Food, Soul vocabulary etc., the author states that the Soul syndrome is predominantly for In-group consumption. He sees it as turned inwards; serving as a symbol of solidarity among the people of the ghetto, but no more than a weak and implicit sense of solidarity against anybody else.<sup>20</sup>

In conclusion, Hannerz sees the emergence of this concept at this juncture as a manifestation of increasingly ambivalent conceptions of the opportunity structure by urban Negro ghetto dwellers -- especially young men.<sup>21</sup> The emergence of Soul goes some way towards meeting the need of stating alternative ideals for those Negroes who find achievement well nigh impossible, also it helps to buttress solidarity among those under-achieving Negroes.<sup>22</sup> Hannerz sees it as advantageous to maintain a diffuse conception of "Soul" for if an intellectually clear definition were established, he feels "Soul" would probably be both less convincing, and less uniting.<sup>23</sup> His view of Soul is that of a piecemeal rhetoric, an attempt to establish a satisfactory self-conception.<sup>24</sup> Further he rejects the social activist conception of Soul and sees very little connection between "Soul brothers" as such and militant black nationalists.<sup>25</sup>

## 2. Jones

Jones, unlike Hannerz, espouses a more social-activist conception of Soul. Jones feels that the one peculiar referent to the drastic change in the Negro from slavery to "citizenship" is his music.<sup>26</sup> And further it is through this media that he sees the emergence of Soul in all its



potent form. Jones sees a cleavage within Black America; he sees among Negroes a psychological continuum that begins with a complete awareness of and dependence on what is now called "folk culture" vis á vis moves to a completely antithetical extreme -- those Negroes who are completely dependent upon the culture of main-stream America.<sup>27</sup> It is in such a climate that Jones sees the embryonic growth of Soul. For Jones the emergence of Soul as evidenced in "Soul Music" signifies a "return to the roots" or rather a conscious re-evaluation of those roots.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, the idea of the Negro having roots and looking upon them as a valuable possession rather than ineradicable shame, is perhaps the most profound change within the Negro consciousness since the early part of the century.<sup>29</sup> Soul, then, is a form of social aggression, an attempt to place upon a "meaningless" social order, an order which would give value to terms of existence that were once considered not only valueless but shameful.<sup>30</sup> Finally, Soul is not only of a social aggressive mould but also of an ethnocentric flavour, for the Soul brother in his attempt to recast the social order in his own image, rejects the culture of white America which he feels denies the possession of the Negro soul.<sup>31</sup>

### 3. Kiel

Kiel's approach is very similar to Jones'. Soul is seen as possessing a strong ideological aspect which ministers to the needs for identity and solidarity among Negroes.<sup>32</sup> Kiel thinks it is possible to interpret the Soul and solidarity syndrome as a key phase in an incipient movement or perhaps as a complex response to the civil rights movement.<sup>33</sup> For Kiel, the reasons are many. American society is seen as passing through the throes of a social revolution, a crisis which is forcing basic cultural





adjustments on the parts of Blacks and Whites. Unfortunately, however, the Black masses have only been emotionally affected by the revolution of rising expectations; most of those in the ghettos have yet to receive any concrete benefits from it.<sup>34</sup> They are still at the bottom of the American socio-economic heap. If the realities are too grim to cope with, if aspirations remain unrealizable, or if the price placed on first class citizenship seems too exorbitant, then defining oneself as a Soul brother may be a way of saving face.<sup>35</sup> Kiel finally asserts that the "Soul movement" has both a nativistic and a revivalistic trend. Nativistic, in that in part it is an affirmation of old values in response to new stresses and conflicts, and revivalistic in that it emphasizes to some extent sweeping reform and the establishment of a new order based, in part at least, on the old values.<sup>36</sup>

It seems then that the concept of Soul, according to the foregoing authors, has two main interpretations. The social-activist conception of Soul subscribed to by Kiel and Jones, and the conception of Soul as a piecemeal rhetorical attempt by frustrated and under-achieving Negroes to establish a satisfactory self-conception - the view of Hannerz. Whatever conception of Soul the various contributors may have, yet certain themes seem to be predominant. The positive emphasis on Blackness - be it ethnocentric or otherwise - the latent influence of religion, the emergence of this folk conception among lower class Blacks all have the healthy line of developing and building the solidarity, not only of lower class Negroes, but I would contend, that of the larger Negro community.

The theme of inferiority has always been the most critical in defining the symbolic status of the Negro. Soul shifts the definition of Negro status from its predominantly negative meaning as an oppressed group





to a more positive conception of group identity. American Negroes have contributed to American culture not by denying their identity (or contrasts) but by asserting it through music, folklore etc., in spite of slavery and other harsh and difficult circumstances in which they found themselves.<sup>37</sup> Indeed some have asserted that they stand to contribute more to the culture and welfare of their society by recognizing and appreciating their own identity, rather than by despising themselves.<sup>38</sup>

Despite important, though slow, changes which have occurred in the Negroes' formal status as citizens, the lot of the masses of Negroes in the North has not changed in substance. Evidence of pauperization, cultural disorientation, and moral degradation persist in spite of, and perhaps because of, the facade of public progress.<sup>39</sup> Formal freedom insists Elizabeth Muhammad, without a substantive basis, is in effect meaningless. Substantive freedom, a people's style of life - material, cultural, moral, and a sense of human dignity - are necessary if Negroes are to rise in the social scale and if they are to gain respect from others. If Negroes are to be regarded as human beings rather than social outcasts, they must become consciously aware of their predicament as a group, and their degradation throughout history which is the bond of their common identity.<sup>40</sup>

Soul, then, can be interpreted as a concept that ministers to the need for identity and solidarity among Negroes. Soul is a manifestation of group identification.<sup>41</sup> Soul attempts to manifest this group identification by emphasizing positive aspects of the Negro's cultural tradition. Crucial retentions of African tradition, the slavery experience, the post-slavery history of oppression, the re-emergence of the non-white world, America's refusal to allow total integration, can all be seen as combining to give Negroes a different reality and a different cultural tradition to



master that reality.<sup>42</sup> Soul, then, manipulates this identity through suffering theme, and instead of focusing on its liabilities attempts to transform it into working assets for the Negro community. Soul, then, is a manifestation of group identification.

### Relationship of the Study of Soul to the Sociology of Race Relations

It is my thesis that the emergence of "Soul" in the U.S.A. is not entirely unique nor haphazard, but can be viewed in the context of majority-minority relations, that is, in the context of the disciplined study of race and ethnic relations. The late Arnold Rose was one of the main proponents of a theoretical framework emphasizing group identification among ethnic minorities. This is the theoretical framework I shall utilize.

### Group Identification Among Minority Groups

By group identification Rose means all the ways in which members of a group feel a sense of unity with one another and the ways in which they manifest that unity.<sup>43</sup> The concept is used in a positive sense and involves a positive desire to identify oneself as a member of the group and a feeling of pleasure when one does so identify. Rose reminds us that group identification is a result of pressures from the outside in the form of majority group prejudice, discrimination etc. Hence, although cognizant of other causative factors, he advances the proposition that in the United States minority groups develop group identification as an adjustment to, and a way of opposing, majority prejudice.<sup>44</sup> While a decline in majority prejudice tends to decrease group identification yet the mere presence of strong prejudice against a group will not guarantee that the group will have strong group identification. Further one finds that in the United States there has not been a perfect correlation between the



degree of prejudice in a group and the amount of group identification, and there are many minority groups that have increased their group identification in recent years without there being any corresponding increase in majority prejudice against them.<sup>45</sup>

A minority group that is the object of majority prejudice and yet has low group identification is in a deplorable condition. The members of such a group lack effective organization, they often seek to change their names, are ashamed of their ancestral background and the only characteristic these members have in common is that they are being picked on by members of the majority group, for certain alleged reasons. This, then, is a manifestation of low group identification.<sup>46</sup>

Group identification grows up as a defensive mechanism and after developing may become a major weapon in the offensive arsenal. Minority group members look back into their history for evidence to disprove charges of cultural inferiority against them, they examine the current uniqueness in their culture and label them manifestations of folk genius, they organize to protest against manifestations of prejudice, they put pressure on those members of their own group who act out the role demanded of them by the majority group. They give the group self-confidence, pride, bonds of loyalty - they give it morale and solidarity.<sup>47</sup>

Group identification is promoted by means of a number of techniques and institutions. Protest organizations, and frequently, newspapers and magazines of the group are established especially to maintain group identification. Other community institutions that tend to be segregated from the general body of American community life provide a means whereby the members of the group may associate with each other away from those who are not members.<sup>48</sup> Churches, especially, offer such an opportunity.





Some minorities - such as French Canadians and Negroes to a certain extent - center almost their entire group existence around the church.

Even some of the community functions that are carried on in conjunction with those of the larger American society tend to develop group identification in the minority. Business, for example, can be a means for developing pride in the group. In several minority groups deliberate efforts are made to promote a campaign to buy from members of one's group.<sup>49</sup> In the realm of politics there is frequently special support for the minority group member who is running for office.

On a less formal level, there are other bases of group identification. The use of a foreign tongue is one such case, but it should be recognized that even where the English language is used, there will be certain words, allusions, and topics of conversation that are unique to the minority group and are generally understood by those who have had the group experiences.<sup>50</sup> Not only the form of speech but also its content is determined by minority group experience and promotes group identification.<sup>51</sup> Expressions of antagonism and resentment against the dominant group will be expressed in the conversation. The protest language occurs not only in private conversation, but also in public speeches and writing. Every group activity, even if conducted by only a small proportion of the total membership of the minority group, and even if conducted in an out-of-the-way place -- since reports of it are widely disseminated -- is a basis for the development of stronger cohesion and group identification.

#### The Problem and Significance of the Study

This study is an examination of the concept "Soul" as it is used in the black community in the United States of America. Although "Soul"





as a concept is not new, its recent emergence and use by Negroes in the United States of America is of theoretical significance. This theoretical significance is seen when "Soul" is examined as a manifestation of group identification - a phenomenon that appears regularly among minority groups. Soul then, in its current use, is not unique but has historical antecedents among Negroes in the United States of America. This glorification and vitalization of blackness was begun earlier but in most instances was overcome by repressive racism, indicating the cultural and social rejection of the spread of black culture by the dominant white majority group. We shall be concerned with tracing this history in our next chapter.

This vitalization of blackness is not a phenomenon restricted to Negroes in the United States, rather it is common to the Negro in the New World. In the Caribbean the concept of negritude served the same purpose. I shall also attempt, in this study, to show the similarities and differences between Soul as a concept and negritude. The former operating among Negroes in the United States of America and the latter among Negroes in the Caribbean.

### Methodology of the Study

This study is of an exploratory and descriptive nature and as most of the data has been drawn primarily from documentary sources, it is basically one of library research. The writer uses historical material and attempts both historical and comparative analysis. Historical materials are not field methods as is the gathering of data by actual participation, interviewing, questionnaires, and so forth. This method usually refers to materials produced in the past that sociologists seek to reconstruct and/or analyze by means of some set of interpretive categories. The set of interpretive categories would presumably be based on a theory or theoretical



framework, purporting to explain and reconstruct the material.<sup>52</sup> This method of analysis is useful to the sociologists for suggesting hypotheses, and helping to establish a general perspective in which to place contemporary data. Further it leads to refinement in theory which in turn leads to more precise techniques on how such materials could be broken down into more precise units of analysis. Its greatest weakness lies in the lack of preciseness of the historical unit of analysis and the many built-in, biases for which the researcher ever has to be wary. This is counterbalanced by the fact that a study of this sort leads to a sensitization of an important problem area in terms of theoretical significance, and this ultimately serves as a point from which future and more comprehensive research may proceed.

### Plan of the Thesis

Chapter II is an historical sketch of group identification among Negroes in the United States of America. In Chapter III some assessment is made of the position of the Negroes in the U.S.A. vis á vis the dominant white majority. Chapter IV deals with "Soul" as a manifestation of group identification among Negroes in the urban Northern ghettos of the U.S.A. In Chapter V Soul is examined in a comparative perspective by looking at negritude in the Caribbean. In Chapter VI the thesis is summarized and the implications are discussed.



# Footnotes

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## CHAPTER II

## GROUP IDENTIFICATION AMONG NEGROES IN THE U.S.A.:

## AN HISTORICAL SKETCH

Introduction

Soul, insofar as it emphasizes positive aspects of Negro culture, is not a unique nor recent phenomenon, but bears striking resemblance to other periods in the history of the Negro as a minority group in the United States of America. What follows is neither a history of the Negroes in the U.S.A. nor a full account of Negro protest movement. Rather, it is a brief narrative of historical events that illuminate the periods in U.S.A. history when group identification among Negroes was in the spotlight.

Before embarking on a history of group identification among Negroes in the U.S.A., it should be stressed that the Negro group in the United States of America historically has a strong cultural unity. This is not to say, of course, that all Negroes in the States would overtly admit this or that there are not great differences of opinion, of personality etc., among Negroes as to the liabilities or assets of this unity which has been to a large extent forged through suffering. Du Bois describes this tradition among Negroes of the United States in this way:

The so-called American Negro group . . . while it is in no sense absolutely set off physically from its fellow Americans, has nevertheless a strong, hereditary cultural unity, born of slavery, of common suffering, prolonged proscription and curtailment of political and civil rights; and especially because of economic and social disabilities. Largely from this fact, have arisen the Negroes' cultural gifts to America -- their rhythm, music and folk song; their religious faith and customs; their contribution to American art and literature, their defense of their country in every war, on land, sea and in the air, and especially the hard, continuous toil upon which the prosperity and wealth



of this continent has largely been built.

. . .The group has long been internally divided by the dilemma as to whether its striving upward be aimed at strengthening its inner cultural and group bonds, both for intrinsic progress and for offensive power against caste; or whether it should seek escape wherever and however possible into surrounding American culture.

. . .Prolonged periods of segregation and discrimination have involuntarily welded the mass almost into a nation within a nation.<sup>1</sup>

As Du Bois mentioned above, this hereditary cultural unity, this bond of solidarity in chains, largely motivated Negroes to contribute vastly to the larger American culture by way of their music, rhythm, folk songs, religious faith, literature etc. Of course, all this in a way contributed to some extent to raising the morale of members of the minority group. But this was not always the case. Under slavery, there was little opportunity for Negroes to identify with their group. Most of them were repressed and in a low status position; they were not allowed to communicate with each other; few of them were allowed to read or learn what was going on in the world; diversions among them were encouraged by their masters. Yet, there is some evidence of group identification during the slave period.

#### Group Identification during Slavery -- The Slave Revolt of Denmark Vessey

The records show fifty-five mutinies on slave ships bound for America.<sup>2</sup> During the years of American Negro slavery there were at least over two hundred slave plots and revolts.<sup>3</sup> Men like Gabriel Prosser, Denmark Vessey and Nat Turner were genuine protest leaders. They came forward to proclaim the cause of the masses of Negroes and were willing to translate their faith in the Negro's right to freedom.<sup>4</sup> There was an effective "underground railroad" and an abolitionist movement in which





Negroes were active. The songs, both sacred and secular expressed a spirit of protest: "Let My People GO," "Walk Jawbone," "Come Jine de Re (railroad)" etc. There were also petty ways of outwitting and thwarting the whites, as by slowing down on the job, stealing a little, telling falsehoods or protective jokes. These had other motivations such as laziness, greed, humor etc., but they were also a form of protest and a way of manifesting to other Negroes that the race was not actually as stupid as whites made out.<sup>5</sup>

The slave revolt of Denmark Vessey was one instance of the protest that Negroes undertook during slavery from which some small degree of black solidarity grew. Vessey's conspiracy in and around Charleston, South Carolina, in the year 1822 was one of the most, if not the most, extensive in black American history.<sup>6</sup> Denmark Vessey was a former slave who had purchased his freedom in 1800. Vessey, was deeply religious. In justifying his plans to his numerous followers he read to them "from the Bible how the children of Israel were delivered out of Egypt from bondage." Anti-slavery speeches uttered in Congress during the Missouri debates of 1820-21 were known to and encouraged the conspirators. If Vessey's companions were to bow to a white person he would rebuke them and observe that all men were born equal and that he was surprised that anyone would degrade himself by such conduct.<sup>7</sup> Vessey would never cringe to the whites and he had not heeded the urgings of the slave-owners that free Negroes go to Africa, because he had not the will and he wanted to stay and see what he could do for his fellow creatures, including his own children who were slaves.<sup>8</sup> Vessey seems to have been acquainted with the successful uprising of slaves in Haiti since, according to the testimony of some of the slaves, he used the Haitian uprising to encourage them in their



enterprise. He also had some knowledge of the principles of the French revolution.

Always, everywhere, Denmark Vessey was teaching, "I know Denmark Vessey," a slave said; "On one occasion he asked me what news" I told him, none. He replied, 'We are free, but the white people here won't let us be so; and the only way is to raise up and fight the whites'".<sup>9</sup> Ridiculing, taunting, threatening, Vessey gained influence among Negroes in Charleston and surrounding areas. Many slaves feared him more than they feared their masters. One man said he feared Vessey more than he feared God.<sup>10</sup>

Having reached this point, Vessey switched from the role of agitator to the role of organizer. Around Christmas in the year 1821 he chose four lieutenants and perfected his organization. Vessey's four lieutenants were sworn to secrecy and were not to reveal the names of their fellow conspirators. The conspiracy was betrayed by a faithful house slave who was asked to join in the revolt. The authorities gradually discovered the leaders in the plot, thirty-five of whom were hanged and thirty-seven were transported beyond the limits of the United States. Vessey accepted his fate courageously and was hanged without revealing the names of his confederates. The last words of Peter Poyas, a lieutenant of Vessey, to his confederates were, "Do not open your lips! Die silent as you shall see me do."<sup>11</sup> Archibald Grimke said "such words considering the circumstances under which they were spoken, were worthy of a son of Sparta or of Rome, when Sparta and Rome were at their highest levels as breeders of iron men."<sup>12</sup>

The history of American slavery, then, is marked by this and at least two hundred and forth-nine other reported Negro conspiracies and



revolts. This does indeed demonstrate that organised efforts at freedom were neither "seldom" nor "rare", but were rather a regular and everrecurring phenomenon in the life of the old South.<sup>13</sup>

Although there were millions of slaves who made no effort at any type of overt protest, this by no means indicates an acceptance of their position as immutable or incapable of amelioration. Slaves who were unable to make the "liberty or death" commitment to open revolt nevertheless developed their own system of protest, peculiarly adapted to the system of chattel slavery under which they lived. Through a type of 'passive rebellion' they registered their dissatisfaction with this system, and provided avenues of relief for themselves from its rigors. A system of plantation ethics sprang up as a direct response to the slaves' condition. These ethics were protectionist in nature and reflected a tacit agreement among the slaves to non-cooperation with the plantation authority.<sup>14</sup>

These influences helped to promote Negro group identification, yet, the group feeling was not very strong. The existence during slavery was basically too animal-like for group pride to develop; was too severe for effective and prolonged protest.

#### Post Civil War - Reconstruction Era: Frederic Douglass, Father of the Protest Movement

The Civil War and emancipation brought an abrupt shift in the hopes and aspirations of American Negroes. It gave them a lift and they gained a new awareness of their potentialities. Education was a primary concern; both old and young went to school or took home lessons in reading. Reconstruction was a period of increased hope for Negroes. During this period the 13th, 14th and 15th Amendments were adopted, giving the Negroes the vote and the promise of equality. In 1875, a legislative climax was







reached in the Reconstruction Era with the passage of the first Civil Rights Law. Negroes had the right to equal accommodations, facilities, and advantages of public transportation, inns, theatres etc. Negroes were elected to every Southern legislature. Twenty served in the U.S. House of Representatives, two represented Mississippi in the U.S. Senate, and a prominent Negro politician was Governor of Louisiana for forty days.

One of the central problems of Reconstruction was how to train and treat these ex-slaves. Three agencies undertook the solution of this problem at first and their influence is apt to be forgotten. Without them the problems of Reconstruction would have been far greater. These agencies were (a) the Negro church, (b) the Negro school, and (c) the Freedmen's Bureau.

After the Civil War the white churches of the South got rid of their Negro members and the Negro church organizations of the North invaded the South. The 20,000 members of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in 1856 increased to 75,000 in 1866 and 200,000 in 1876, while their property increased sevenfold. The Negro Baptists with 150,000 members in 1850 had fully a half-million in 1870.<sup>15</sup> There were, before the end of Reconstruction, perhaps 10,000 local bodies touching the majority of the freed population. They were primitive, ill-governed, at times fantastic groups of human beings, and yet it is difficult to exaggerate the importance of this new responsibility -- the first social institution fully controlled by black men in America, with traditions that rooted back to Africa and with possibilities which made the 35,000 Negro American churches today the most extensive Negro institutions in the world.<sup>16</sup>

With the Negro church, but separate from it, arose the school as the first expression of the missionary activity of Northern religious



bodies. Seldom in the history of the world has an almost totally illiterate population been given the means of self-education in so short a time.<sup>17</sup> The movement started with the Negroes themselves. They continued to form the dynamic force behind it. The education of this mass had to begin at the top with the training of teachers, and within a few years a dozen colleges and normal schools had started; by 1877, 571,506 Negro children were in school.<sup>18</sup>

The Freedmen's Bureau was an attempt to establish a government guardianship over the Negroes and ensure their economic and civil rights. Its establishment was a herculean task both physically and socially, and it not only met the solid opposition of the white South, but even the North looked at the new bureau as socialistic and overpaternal. For the Negro masses at that time, the interests in education, land, and politics were together an integral part of the substance of freedom, the Freedmen's Bureau catered to these needs and helped to build somewhat the morale of the Negro.

A giant literally and figuratively among militant Negro leaders was the ex-slave abolitionist and journalist Frederic Douglass (1817-1895). Born in the lowest position of society, Douglass emancipated himself and became an orator, an abolitionist and editor, a politician, a seer, and a prophet. Born black and hungry in a society that forbade slaves to read, he lifted himself by his own efforts and for fifty years, from 1845 to 1895, he was in the forefront of the fight for human freedom. During this period, he laid the foundation for the black protest movement. For seventeen years, beginning in 1847, he edited an effective abolitionist weekly, the *North Star*, advocating shrewd practical tactics of liberation rather than outright violence. He aided the cause of women's suffrage and co-operated



with Harriet Beecher Stowe in opening an industrial school for colored girls. When the Governor of Virginia sought to arrest him as a conspirator in John Brown's attack on Harper's Ferry, he escaped to Canada.

During the Civil War he called upon Negro fighting men to join the two Massachusetts colored regiments, which included his own sons. He was one of the first to act as a national spokesman for his race, especially before President Lincoln. When the war ended, he became a Reconstruction leader and argued radical ideas for a prolonged Northern domination; and he published the *National New Era*, which was dedicated to freedmen, Negro suffrage, and civil rights.

Although he died in 1895, Frederic Douglass speaks with uncommon force to the problems of this age. One hundred and eleven years ago he was leading a fight for integrated schools in Rochester, New York.<sup>19</sup> One hundred and one years ago, he was denouncing hypocrisy and fraud with pre-Baldwin fury.

The whole history of the progress of human liberty shows that all concessions yet made to her august claims, have been borne of earnest struggle . . . If there is no struggle, there is no progress. This struggle may be a moral one, or may be a physical one, or it may be both moral and physical, but it must be a struggle. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did, and it never will.<sup>20</sup>

Life during Douglass' era was not easy for a white agitator: it was impossible for a black man. Douglass suffered greatly at the hands of pro-slavery thugs. But Douglass was a man, in the deepest and truest sense of that word. He knew that to be a man is to be responsible. He knew too that manhood was founded on self-respect and self-esteem. He was involved. He did not isolate himself from the masses. Wherever he went the black man went with him.<sup>21</sup> He said:







It is more than a figure of speech to say that (Negroes) are a people chained together. We are one people -- one in general complexion, one in common degradation, one in popular estimation. As one rises, all must rise, and as one falls, all must fall . . . The wrongs of our brethren should be our constant theme. There should be no time too precious, no calling too holy, no place too sacred, to make room for the cause.<sup>22</sup>

Douglass was a man consumed by the cause. As a theorist and advocate, he stressed the structural roots of racism. He said it was libelous to call the race problem the Negro problem. The real problem was the white problem. The only solution, he told black Americans, was to struggle. Although he considered the ballot indispensable, he did not neglect economic power. Economic power and political power, he said, were linked, for political power could translate itself into economic power.<sup>23</sup> In the midst of the terrible economic crisis of the 1850's, Douglass told black Americans that it was necessary to find new ways of making a living.

Douglass saw the Civil War as a struggle to complete the American revolution. Legal emancipation alone, he said, would not free the slaves. It would be necessary to train new leaders, re-knit shattered Afro-American family life, and instill in the hearts of Southerners respect for democratic processes. The task before America, Douglass said, was "nothing less than radical revolution in all the modes of thought which had flourished under the blighted slave system."<sup>24</sup>

After the Emancipation Proclamation was issued, Douglass demanded the ballot and land for the freedmen. When the North reneged on its promise and turned the freedmen over to the tender mercies of their former masters, Douglass denounced this act mercilessly. In 1883, he denounced the Afro-Americans "so-called emancipation as a stupendous fraud, a fraud upon him, a fraud upon the world!" America, he claimed, had abandoned



the Negro, ignored his rights and left him a deserted or defrauded, a swindled, and an outcast man -- in law, free; in fact, a slave.<sup>25</sup> In speech after speech Douglass told America that it was courting social disaster. It was impossible, he said, to degrade black people without degrading the social fabric of America. The perversion of legal processes, he said, would eventually force black people outside the community, for "where justice is denied, where poverty is enforced, where ignorance prevails, and where any one class is made to feel that society is an organized conspiracy to oppress, rob and degrade . . . neither persons nor property will be safe."<sup>26</sup> "Hungry men," he said, "will eat. Desperate men will commit crime. Outraged men will seek revenge."<sup>27</sup>

Like Denmark Vessey who preceded him and Martin Luther King who came after him, Douglass tried in his own way to relate to his people. He tried to build the group identification of his people by urging them along with forceful and challenging protestation. Despite all this, Negro group identification was not high in absolute terms. The prevailing poverty effectively inhibited communication among blacks. The terror of the Restoration forcefully repressed black Americans once again.

#### End of Reconstruction -- Rise of Booker T. Washington

As Southern white governments returned to power, beginning with Virginia in 1869 and ending with Louisiana in 1877, the program of returning the Negro to a subordinate place in American life was accelerated. Reconstruction had left the South unreconstructed. Although the North had won the war they had for all practical purposes lost the peace. By 1877 Federal troops had been withdrawn from the South and government restored to the hands of the Southern whites. Gradually through the erection of



an elaborate legal structure, the Southern states sought to assign the Negro to his 'proper place'. Segregation in certain areas of Southern life was made mandatory. At first this trend was concentrated on segregation of public transport -- streetcars and railroads -- but continued with increased impetus and ever widening scope during the period of reversion of white supremacy in 1890.

The movement towards segregation was aided by the general trend of that period and by an increasingly restrictive interpretation of the Fourteenth Amendment (equal protection of the laws) by the U.S. Supreme Court. Imperialism was at this time at its zenith in the last years of the 19th Century. Europe was colonizing Asia and Africa, and, the notion of the 'white man's burden' was gradually becoming prevalent among white men. Most reasoned that if it was reasonable and acceptable for white men to go into 'backward areas' in faraway places and have dominion over their non-white human counterparts, then why should not the same hold for white men in the South. This point of view was prevalent among white Southern supremacists, and the North usually acquiesced or encouraged this view. The high water mark in the move towards the entrenchment of segregation was not reached until 1896 when in the Plessy vs. Ferguson case the court upheld state legislation that discriminated against Negroes, saying that separation of accommodations did not deprive the Negro of equal rights as long as the accommodations were equal. This "Separate but Equal" doctrine provided an appropriate umbrella under which the South could shelter for years to come. Many other factors contributed to the second-class citizenship of the Negroes. Jim Crow laws<sup>28</sup>, bitterness on the part of the defeated South, almost complete economic destitution, and ideological confusion of Northern liberals and carpetbaggers were some of the contributing







factors. The ready willingness of the Federal government to compromise on the citizenship status of Negroes for the sake of national unity, also proved to be one of the main ingredients that fertilized the soil for the speedy growth of a bi-racial system.<sup>29</sup> The avowed main purpose of this system was to keep Negroes completely powerless in local and national affairs.<sup>30</sup>

After the end of Reconstruction, Negro leaders sought desperately to find some program and solution to their problems. They responded to their worsening conditions by protesting against and boycotting segregated facilities, appealing to the Republican party, forming alliances with the Populists, supporting Democratic or Independent candidates, proposing schemes for emigrating to Africa, and trying to revive among white Northerners interest in Negro rights. Nothing, however, seemed to stem the waves of lynchings, disenfranchisements, segregation and poverty. High morale, except for work, was the last thing the white South wanted of its Negroes. It was all right to encourage the Negroes to be happy, but everything smacking of group identification had to be wiped out. In this atmosphere the stage was set for the appearance of Booker T. Washington, Principal of Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute.

In the year 1895 the fiery protest leader Frederic Douglass died and the Virginia born ex-slave Booker T. Washington made his famous 'Atlanta Compromise' speech before the Cotton States exposition. This speech was hailed by white political leaders and the press throughout the nation. Negroes, however, were less enthusiastic and most felt that the speech suited the white prejudiced element in the country. Nevertheless, Washington soon became the foremost spokesman of the Negro community. Within a short time Booker T. Washington had become the arbiter of Negro



affairs as white philanthropists and organizations channeled political patronage, educational funds, and newspaper advertisements through him. From 1895 almost until his death in 1915, Washington served as the paramount intermediary between the Negro and white communities. In public life Washington presented a conciliatory and accommodationist image, but as August Meier has discovered by a close examination of Washington's papers, he presented quite a different image in private.<sup>31</sup> Secretly he provided funds for lawyers to challenge segregationist laws and defend Negroes, and quietly worked against many of the things and people which he appeared to condone in public.

The central theme in Washington's philosophy was that through thrift, industry and christian character, Negroes would eventually attain their constitutional rights. Although Washington held to full citizenship rights and integration as his objective, he masked this goal beneath an approach that satisfied influential elements that were either indifferent or hostile to its fulfillment.<sup>32</sup> His program appealed to a substantial group of Negroes -- to those Negroes who were coming to count for most -- in large part to a rising middle class. In fact, stress upon economics as an indirect route to the isolation of the race problem, interest in industrial education, the appeal to race pride and solidarity, and denial of any interest in social equality were all ideas that had become dominant in the Negro community.<sup>33</sup> Washington was acceptable to Negroes partly because of the prestige and power he held among whites and partly because his views were dominant in the Negro community throughout the country. His accommodating approach was general throughout the South. Thus, in spite of his accommodating tone and his verbal emphasis upon economy as the solution to the race problem, Washington was surreptitiously engaged in



undermining the American race system and segregation. In spite of his strictures against political activity, he undoubtedly had a significant impact on Negro thought, and helped in his own way to build group identification.<sup>34</sup>

Du Bois, The Niagara Movement and the N.A.A.C.P.

Of the great trio of Negro leaders who tried to build group identification, Douglass was the orator, Washington the man of practical affairs, and Du Bois the accomplished and polished writer.

Du Bois was of the era of Booker T. Washington, and the latter's refusal to make a direct and open attack on Jim Crow, plus his implicit acceptance of segregation, brought him into conflict with a band of Negro militants, among whom was Du Bois. In W.E.B. Du Bois, we find implicitly stated most of the threads of Negro thought of his time. On the one hand he had a mystic sense of race and of the mission of the Negro, which made him sympathetic towards ideas of racial pride and solidarity as sentiments useful for racial uplift. On the other hand he held explicitly and constantly, especially after 1901, to the ideal of waging a struggle for full acceptance in American society.<sup>35</sup> He regarded segregated institutions as second best instruments in the struggle for advancement and citizenship rights and he envisaged not amalgamation but cultural pluralism, as the goal of American Negroes.<sup>36</sup>

In the summer of 1905, Du Bois and twenty-eight other Negro intellectuals met at Niagara Falls, Canada, in the hope of forming a national protest organization. The group advocated and organized an aggressive defense of Negro civil rights throughout the country. The Niagara movement never attained any great strength, nevertheless it reflected a







growing differentiation within the Negro community itself. Throughout slavery and the years immediately following, one finds that the overwhelming majority of American Negroes shared a common lot. Emancipation and the rise of an educated element changed that somewhat, and it became more difficult to speak of 'the Negro leader' or of 'the Negro community' that he was supposed to represent.<sup>37</sup> With the advent of the Niagara Movement we have for the first time a genuine Negro intelligentsia organizing on a national scale to draw up protests and to effect social change. The Movement, besides providing alternatives to the leadership of Booker T. Washington, also was the forerunner of the modern N.A.A.C.P.

The N.A.A.C.P. grew out of a conference held in 1909 to protest against the vicious Springfield race riot of the summer of 1908. The 'young radicals' of the Niagara Movement were invited to the conference with other white liberals. The organization set as its goals (a) the establishment of a permanent organization that would work for the abolition of all forced segregation, (b) equal education for Negro and white children, (c) the complete enfranchisement of the Negro, and (d) the enforcement of the 14th and 15th Amendments.<sup>38</sup> A legal redress committee was formed soon after the founding of the N.A.A.C.P. and some important legal victories were won in the earliest days of the organization -- beginning with the Supreme Court decision against 'grandfather clauses' in 1915. Research and public information, another phase of the Association's program, was under the direction of Du Bois. This alliance of the white liberals with the Negro leaders in the formation of the N.A.A.C.P. was in the old abolitionist tradition and propelled the N.A.A.C.P. into the position of being the first national protest organization of its kind. Du Bois has been known as a protest leader and, like Douglass, he stated



as ultimate the goals which Washington obscured. He did not, however, envisage the degree of amalgamation and the loss of racial consciousness that Douglass regarded as the summum bonum.<sup>39</sup> Like Washington he emphasized race pride and solidarity and economic well-being. At first he stressed the role of a college educated elite -- talented tenth -- but later he developed a vision of a world largely dominated by the colored races which would combine with the white workers in overthrowing the domination of white capital and thus secure social justice under socialism.<sup>40</sup> One of the foremost trends in his thinking regarding moulding and building group identification was his advocacy of the need to maintain racial solidarity and integrity among blacks throughout the world.

When Du Bois died, on August 27, 1963, he had made a name in science and literature, and had lifted his race by founding the modern black protest movement and the Pan African Movement. In Africa, at his death, there was a "visible empire"; and, in America, there were two visible movements -- the N.A.A.C.P., which he helped to found in 1909, and the Freedom Movement which is reverberating echoes of new ideas he articulated between 1903 and 1933.

#### The 1920's, the New Militancy, and Garveyism

The N.A.A.C.P., drew its strength from large numbers of Southern Negroes who had migrated to Northern cities, from Negro professionals, and it continued to lead the vanguard in the struggle for Negro upliftment for sometime. In the great concrete wilderness of the North, however, under the impact of industrialization and urbanization, the Negro outlook changed considerably.<sup>41</sup> The Negro in the city became less religious, more skeptical, more knowing, demanding and detached.<sup>42</sup>



The years immediately following World War I were deeply disillusioning for all Americans, and especially Negro Americans. Not only did they witness the display of selfish national and international policies, but they also experienced some of the bloodiest race riots in the history of the country, and they lost many of the good jobs they had gained during the war.<sup>43</sup> White Americans reacted with cynicism and isolationism; Negro Americans reacted with black nationalism and separatism, both of which further contributed to group identification and morale.<sup>44</sup>

The Red Summer of 1919 was the climax of a chain of events that changed the orientation of American Negroes. The indifference and hostility of the Woodrow Wilson Administration, the turbulence of the Great Migration, the riots, massacres, and humiliation of World War I period: all these loosened the Negro's sentimental bonds to America and prepared the way for new frontiers of strife and controversy.<sup>45</sup> The mood of defiance reached a peak in the revolt of the '20's, a revolt based on a flood-like surge of racial consciousness. Negro nationalism, a new mass phenomenon grounded on the affirmation of Negro values and a celebration of African ties was the dominant theme of the cultural and spiritual explosions that rocked the ghetto in the post World War I period.<sup>46</sup>

The new Negro literacy revolt which ushered in the post war period dramatized the Negro's spiritual emancipation. Negro writers and artists dropped their masks and spoke with unparalled frankness and bitterness. Taking a more subjective stance towards their experience in America, poets like Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, Countee Cullen, blatantly projected Negroness and Negro values into the mainstream.<sup>47</sup> Langston Hughes sounded the dominant note:







We younger Negro artists who create now intend to express our individual dark skinned selves without fear or shame. If white people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, it doesn't matter. We know we are beautiful and ugly too. If colored people are pleased, we are glad. If they are not, their displeasure won't matter either. We build our temple for tomorrow, strong as we know how, and we stand on top of the mountain, free within ourselves.<sup>48</sup>

The works of Hughes and other Negro intellectuals reflected the inner migration of the Negro outlook.<sup>49</sup>

But this was more than a literary stance. For these intellectuals rebellion was a way of life, a quest for identity and meaning. Three main themes were predominant in this quest. (1) A celebration of the non-machine, non-Puritan, non-exploitative Negro folk tradition. (2) An identification with Africa and (3) an affirmation of the validity and meaning of Negro experiences as revealed in the history of the Negro.<sup>50</sup>

By reversing the scale of values Negro intellectuals devised a conceptual defense to the demeaning images encrusted in the dominant white tradition. By manipulating symbols and images, the new Negro avant-garde tried to emancipate the Negro and to free him from demeaning white symbols and images.<sup>51</sup>

Negro scholars too played a key role in this germinal movement. Carter Woodson, the father of Negro history, produced a series of scholarly works that gave the movement an intellectual base. With the founding, in 1915, of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, Woodson created an ideological scaffolding for both Negro and white scholars.<sup>52</sup> In the same period, the Negro ethos reached out to non-white peoples of the world. Du Bois, who envisioned an independent African State, held a pioneer Pan-African Congress in 1919. By 1925, three such congresses had been held under the auspices of American Negroes.<sup>53</sup>



All these efforts certainly caused group identification to rise among Negroes. The extent of this new group identification was clearly manifested in the career of Marcus Garvey, one of the greatest mass leaders in the history of Negro protest. The hidden reasons for Garvey's upsurge lay in the changing conditions of the age. The post war years were years of acute reaction. White men were anxious and they lashed out at imaginary enemies -- Jews, Catholics, Negroes. Rightist organizations sprang up. The Klan was revived, and racial hate reached a fever pitch. There was, simultaneously, a festering resentment in the Northern ghettos, a resentment that found no outlet through established patterns of Negro leadership. A revelation of the depth of Negro discontent was a student strike at Fisk University which attracted national attention and spread to other Southern colleges.<sup>54</sup>

Garvey's primary appeal was a glorification of blackness. He stimulated race pride by pointing out that Africa had a civilization long before Europe had. Contending that whites would always be racists, he stressed racial pride and history, and insisted that black men develop a distinct race based on civilization of their own. On a more practical level he urged support of Negro businesses and through the U.N.I.A. -- United Negro Improvement Association, organized a chain of groceries, restaurants, hotels etc.

The main effect of the literary renaissance, the Garveyite movement and other such Negro organizations, was that the Negro masses suddenly realized that they had abilities that could impress even whites.<sup>55</sup> Also, as Negro intellectuals became established in certain creative fields of endeavor and continued to produce, they gave the ordinary Negroes a sense of group pride.<sup>56</sup>



### The 1960's and the Rejuvenated Militancy: Soul and Black Power

The second half of the 20th Century has seen a new phase of protest. In 1954 a great legal victory was won for Negroes when the Supreme Court ruled school segregation unconstitutional. In 1955 Negroes hit the streets in Montgomery, Alabama and walked to work rather than ride segregated buses. The resistance struggle had moved out of the courts and "onto the block" where it has remained and accelerated with increasing intensity.

Though the struggle moved into the streets, it carried with it an attitude of accommodation -- non-violence. It sought to get the support of whites by using a method that would get the approval of whites. This was Booker T. Washington's technique and Dr. Martin L. King, Jr. became his successor, albeit a dynamic one.

The non-violent protest movement failed to activate thousands of blacks. As economist Vivian Henderson pointed out in his testimony before the Kerner Riot Commission:

No one can deny that all Negroes have benefited from civil rights laws and desegregation in public life one way or another. The fact is, however, that the masses of Negroes have not experienced tangible benefits in a significant way. This is so in education and housing. It is critically so in the areas of jobs and economic opportunity. Expectations of Negro masses for equal job opportunity programs have fallen far short of fulfillment. Negroes have made gains . . . There have been important gains. But . . . the masses of Negroes have been virtually untouched by those gains.<sup>57</sup>

Thus although the Negro middle class made some significant progress, for the masses of Negroes the situation was bleak. The non-violence doctrine and white paternalism of the civil rights movement hardly affected them. As the civil rights movement came to the North it confronted black people living in the ghettos where non-violence is understandably equated with lack of mother wit. As the movement penetrated the South it encountered





overt and covert enforcers of the Southern code for whom non-violence was not a moral force but simply red carpeting on the path to broken heads, broken and dead bodies.

Unable to come through with the material advancement, or moral upliftment it promised, the non-violent civil rights movement became discredited. Around the same period young Black activists attacked the paternalistic aspects of that movement. They turned inwards and began talking of race pride, black consciousness, black history and black culture. In short they laid the basis for the cultural nationalism which has become characteristic of the black power concept. The concept of black power was introduced in an atmosphere of militancy (during James Meredith's march through Mississippi) and in many quarters it has been equated with violence and riots. There have been various interpretations of "Black Power", indeed some writers have viewed it as simply the largest swing in the pendulum which marks the perennial oscillation between integration on one side and separation-nationalism on the other.<sup>58</sup> This unresolved conflict in goals has plagued the black community since the days of slavery. Whatever the interpretation of Black Power, the almost spontaneous attraction which it holds for the masses lay in its ability to instil a sense of worth and identity -- no matter how fleeting or vague -- in the ordinary black people.

The concept of Soul also emerged during this period as another manifestation of the era of black reflection that is sweeping the black community in the U.S.A. Although Soul -- like Black Power -- has many interpretations yet it has gained greater acceptance in the larger non-Negro community than has Black Power. Soul -- according to its proponents -- is especially symbolised in Soul Music, Soul Food and Soul Language.<sup>59</sup> It is difficult -- and really not at all relevant -- to say which area is



enjoying the most widespread usage. By commercial yardsticks, however, Soul has arrived -- and it has hit the hit parade as well as the "race market", in the suburbs as well as the ghettos, in the Midwestern campuses as well as Harlem's Apollo Theatre.

By yardsticks used outside the trade, Soul's arrival is even more significant. Since its tortuous evolution is so intertwined with Negro history and so expressive of Negro culture, Negroes naturally tend to value it as a sort of badge of black identity.<sup>60</sup> "The most abiding moods expressed in our most vital popular art form are not simply a matter of entertainment", says Negro novelist Ralph Ellison. "They also tell us who and where we are."<sup>61</sup>

Militant young Negroes put a more defiant slant on Soul. Charles Kiel, a white ethnomusicologist and Leroi Jones, renowned Negro poet, attach a social-activist connotation to the concept. Explains Kiel: "For a Negro to say 'B.B. King is my main man' is to say 'I take pride in who I am'. With this self-acceptance, a measure of unity is gained, and a demand is made upon white America: 'Accept us on our own terms' ".<sup>62</sup> When Soul is based on a "fellowship of suffering" -- "a bond of solidarity through chains", it may involve not only a demand for white acceptance but an outright exclusion of whites. As Godfrey Cambridge states, "Soul is getting kicked in the ass until you don't know what it's for; it's being broke down and out and people telling you you're no good. It's the language of the sub-culture; but you can't learn it 'cause no one can give you black lessons."<sup>63</sup>

Used in this way the Soul concept becomes a mystique, a glorification of Negritude in all its manifestations. The Soul brother makes a point of emphasizing Negro inflections such as "yo" for "your", of abandoning



slang words and phrases as soon as they reach universal currency, of eating food such as chitlins, pig's feet and black-eyed peas, in mastering a loose, cocky way of walking down the street -- in doing all the things that are closed off or alien to 'The Man'.<sup>64</sup> The closer a Negro gets to the 'white' sound nowadays, the less soulful he is considered to be, and the more he is regarded as having betrayed his heritage.<sup>65</sup>

Soul is the force that radiates from a sense of self-hood,  
a sense of knowing where you've been and what it means.  
It is a way of life -- but it is always the hard way.  
Its essence is ingrained in those who suffer and endure to  
laugh about it.<sup>66</sup>

Soul, and Black Power, thus shift the definition of Negro status from its predominantly negative meaning as an oppressed group to a more positive conception of group identification.

### Summary and Conclusions

This historical sketch has attempted to show that throughout their history as a minority group in the United States, Negro group identification has been built up haltingly until now it is a potent force in Negro life in America. It should be stressed that the group identification almost always centred around black charismatic, influential leaders - like Vessey, Douglass, Du Bois, Garvey, etc. These leaders were undoubtedly indicators of times of solidarity and cohesion that existed - if even for a while - in the black community.

This is not to say, however, that there are not Negroes who are personally demoralized and who feel ashamed of their connection with the minority group, but what Arnold Rose said ten years ago remains true. He states,

. . . Despite the class and other differences among Negroes,  
despite the personal disorganization arising out of extreme





poverty, despite the migration to a culturally different urban North, despite the selfishness that inheres in any group, despite the group self-hatred engendered by the majority's attitudes -- despite all these blocs to group identification -- Negroes have built up a high degree of pride and attachment to their group.<sup>67</sup>

Group identification, Arnold Rose states, can be viewed as the minority's major defense against discrimination and prejudice from the majority.<sup>68</sup> Rose continues

It aids the minority group in its relations with the majority. It assures active or passive resistance to discrimination and deprivation. It aids materially in the organization of any campaigning for improving the minority group's status. It promotes achievements on the part of some minority group members, which impress the majority. It also builds courage and self-confidence in minority group members when they come in contact with the majority group, so that they do not appear as dull or subservient as the majority expects them to be.<sup>69</sup>

But Rose also sees negative features ramifying from this group identification. Foolhardiness and a tendency to martyrdom without securing the gain that risk-taking can often secure is seen as one negative feature. So is the creation of a group pride that may so blind individuals that they become satisfied with mediocrity. And finally chauvinism and nationalism, which voluntarily separates the group from the broader opportunities and contacts that it presumably is fighting to secure, is viewed as the final negative feature.<sup>70</sup>

Whatever the features -- be they negative or positive -- it seems that the whole process of group identification among a minority group will be dependent not only on the forces at work within that minority group but also on the nature of the society within which the process operates. The future of Soul, then, as a manifestation of group identification within the Negro community will be dependent on the nature of the society within which it operates. This necessitates some examination of the Negro and his position in the larger society.



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## CHAPTER III

POSITION OF THE NEGRO IN THE U.S.A. VIS Á VIS THE  
DOMINANT WHITE SOCIETY (1954-1968)

The present mood of the Negro in the U.S.A. can only be properly understood in the light of the re-definition of the race problem in the last decade. This chapter, then, is an effort at stock-taking. It does not purport to set down the complete historical record of the past decade or even to give a full and complete narrative of all the dramatic events. Rather, it seeks to look at the progress and/or non-progress that the Negro has made in relation to his white counterpart.

The fate of Negro Americans has always been and remains largely in the hands of the dominant white population. Since whites are almost ninety per cent of the population, are more than nine-five per cent of the college graduates and have perhaps ninety-five per cent of the wealth, and since they occupy almost all key positions in the social order and control the armed forces and the law enforcement agencies, they could, by acting in unison, prevent any economic, educational or other gains by Negroes.<sup>1</sup> Whether or not whites have acted in unison might be debatable, what is true, however, is the fact that the gains -- economic, educational and social -- made by the Negro population have been minimal. Prejudice against Negroes may have become more entrenched over the years and the growing resistance to de facto desegregation in housing, schools and employment in New York, Chicago and Philadelphia and other non-Southern cities, have made it crystal clear that the South has no monopoly on the spirit of white supremacy.<sup>2</sup> The feeling that the white race, with its



propriety claim to certain areas of privilege and advantage, is being threatened by an intrinsically different, alien and subordinate group, is national not just Southern.<sup>3</sup>

To get an idea of this feeling, or rather this manifestation of pervasive discrimination and segregation, and to put in proper perspective the corresponding mood of the Negro, I shall briefly sketch the position of the two groups in the spheres of education, housing, employment, and occupation and income.

### Education

In 1954 the Supreme Court of the U.S.A. laid down in the Brown vs. Board of Education decision that the separate but equal doctrine was unconstitutional. This decision was hailed as a landmark in the Negro's quest towards equality. What was novel in the Brown case, was its sweeping character that went beyond the issue at hand, and the notice by the Court that it would require a general program of desegregation to implement the constitutional principle.<sup>4</sup> The decision of 1954 raised expectations that even today have not been realized; and thus the psychological and other effects of this disappointment on the Negro has been cataclysmic. Colored parents in 1954 had grounds for hoping that their children might some day enjoy the same education as whites; in 1964 they had reason to fear that their grandchildren would still be shunted off to segregated schools.

The sense of betrayal that tore at their hearts was profound indeed. Negro education, while officially part of the community educational system, has continued to be a separate and unequal subsidiary of this system. In other words the segregated educational institution persists despite token integration.





The Kerner Riot Report Commission reflects the indictment well when it states:

. . . Education in a democratic society must equip the children of the nation to realize their potential and to participate fully in American life. For the community at large, the schools have discharged this responsibility well. But for many minorities, and particularly for the children of the racial ghetto, the schools have failed to provide the educational experience which would help overcome the effects of discrimination and deprivation.<sup>5</sup>

It continues:

The bleak record of public education for ghetto children is growing worse. In the critical skills -- verbal and reading ability -- Negro students fall behind whites with each year of school completed.<sup>6</sup>

The report goes on to state that many more Negro than white students are school drop-outs; and that in the metropolitan North and West, Negro students are more than three times as likely as white students to drop out of school by age 16 - 17.<sup>7</sup> The Coleman Report -- cited in the Kerner Commission Report -- states the actual non-enrollment rate for Negro students in these areas just mentioned, was twenty per cent as opposed to six per cent for white students.<sup>8</sup> As reflected by the high unemployment rates for graduates of ghetto schools, and the even higher proportion of employed workers who are in low-skilled, low-paid jobs, many of those who do not graduate are not equipped to enter the normal job market and have great difficulty securing employment.<sup>9</sup>

Several factors, the Commission states, have converged to produce this critical situation. The first factor is the large number of inner city schools which are rigidly segregated. This racial isolation in urban public schools is viewed as the result principally of residential segregation and widespread employment of the "neighborhood school" policy which transfers segregation from housing to education.<sup>10</sup> The second factor is



the fact that the schools attended by disadvantaged Negro children commonly are staffed by teachers with less experience and lower qualifications than those attended by middle-class whites. Further, teaching in disadvantaged areas is made more difficult by the high rate of student turnover. Continuity of education becomes exceedingly difficult, the more so because many of the students entering ghetto schools during the school year come from rural Southern schools and are thus behind even the minimum levels of achievement attained by their fellow Northern-born students.<sup>11</sup>

The third factor is the overcrowding in the inner city schools attended by Negroes. Over the last decade vast population changes have caused relatively affluent whites to leave the city and to be replaced by Negroes. The overcrowded and inadequately supplied schools have severe effects upon the quality of education, the most important of which is that teachers are forced to concentrate on maintaining class-room discipline, and thus have little time and energy to perform their primary function -- educating the children.<sup>12</sup>

Poor facilities and curricula, inadequate funds, lack of effective community-school relations, all these foregoing factors along with the oppressive ghetto environment in which most Negroes are forced to live, have combined to provide less than full equality of educational opportunity for Negroes. This failure is one of the persistent sources of grievance and resentment within the Negro community, and has led to great hostility among Negro parents and students towards the school system. But the most dramatic evidence of this relationship between educational practices and civil disorder lies in the high incidence of riot participation by ghetto youths who had not completed high school.<sup>13</sup>

If the situation looked bleak in the educational sphere, in housing it was just as bad.



## Housing

The size of the Negro population in central cities is closely related to the total national Negro population growth.<sup>14</sup> In the past sixteen years, about ninety-eight per cent of this growth has occurred within metropolitan areas, and eighty-six per cent in the central cities of those areas.<sup>15</sup> The passage of the National Housing Act in 1934 signalled a new Federal commitment to provide housing for the nation's citizens. Fifteen years later Congress made the commitment explicit in the Housing Act of 1949, establishing as a national goal, the realization of "a decent home and suitable environment for every American family." Today, after more than three decades of fragmented and grossly under-funded Federal housing programs, decent housing remains a chronic problem for the disadvantaged urban household.<sup>16</sup> During the decade of the 1950's when vast numbers of Negroes were migrating to the cities, only four million of the 16.8 million new housing units constructed throughout the nation were built in the central cities. These additions were counterbalanced by the loss of 1.5 million central city units through demolition and other means. The result was that the number of non-whites, most of whom would be Negro, living in sub-standard housing increased from 1.4 to 1.8 million, even though the number of substandard units declined.<sup>17</sup>

Also Negro housing units are far more likely to be overcrowded than those occupied by whites. In U.S. metropolitan areas in 1960, twenty-five per cent of all non-white units were overcrowded by the standard measure (that is they contained 1.01 or more persons per room). Only eight per cent of all white occupied units were in this category.<sup>18</sup> Negroes in large cities are often forced to pay the same rents as whites and receive less for their money, or pay higher rents for the same accommodations. Further,





thousands of landlords in disadvantaged neighborhoods openly violate building codes with impunity, thereby providing a constant demonstration of flagrant discrimination by legal authorities.<sup>19</sup>

The reasons many Negroes live in decaying slums are relatively easy to ascertain. First and foremost is poverty which prevents ghetto residents from paying the rents necessary to support decent housing.<sup>20</sup> The second major factor condemning vast numbers of Negroes to urban slums is racial discrimination in the housing market. Discrimination prevents access to many non-slum areas, particularly the suburbs, and has a detrimental effect on ghetto housing itself. By restricting the area open to a growing population, housing discrimination makes it profitable for landlords to break up ghetto apartments for denser occupancy, thus hastening housing deterioration. By creating a 'back pressure' in the racial ghettos, discrimination keeps prices and rents of older, more deteriorated housing in the ghetto higher than they would be in a truly free and open market.<sup>21</sup>

Many Negroes, then, are forced to live in inadequate housing in decaying slums, because of the rigid housing discrimination practices adhered to by whites. This pervasive aspect of discrimination is even more accentuated in the sphere of employment.

### Employment

The capacity to obtain and hold a "good job" is the traditional test of participation in American society. Steady employment with adequate compensation provides both purchasing power and social status. It develops the capabilities, confidence, and self-esteem an individual needs to be a responsible citizen and provides a basis for a stable family life.<sup>22</sup>

This profound viewpoint of the Kerner Riot Report Commission is further supported by Moynihan. He says:



The principal measure of progress towards equality will be that of employment. It is the primary source of individual or group identity. In America what you do is what you are; to do nothing is to be nothing; to do little is to be little. The equations are implacable and blunt, and ruthlessly public.<sup>23</sup>

Moynihan continues:

For the Negro American it is already, and will continue to be the master problem. It is the measure of Negro competence, and also of the competence of American Society. Most importantly, the linkage between problems of employment and the range of social pathology that afflicts the Negro community is unmistakable. Employment not only controls the present for the Negro American but, in a most profound way, it is creating the future as well.<sup>24</sup>

Thus one can say with some assurance that availability or non-availability of employment opportunities is some indication of the progress or non-progress of groups within the American society -- there is little question about the importance of employment and occupations in the U.S.A.

For the Negroes in the U.S.A. their position with regard to employment has been bleak and dismal. Unemployment rates among Negroes have declined from a post war high of 12.6 per cent in 1958 to 8.2 in 1967. Notwithstanding this decline, unemployment rates for Negroes are still double those for whites in every category. Moreover, since 1954, even during the current unprecedented period of sustained economic growth, unemployment among Negroes has been continuously above the 6.0 per cent "recession" level widely regarded as a sign of serious economic weakness, when prevalent for the entire work force.<sup>25</sup> Even more important, perhaps, than unemployment is the related problem of the undesirable nature of many jobs open to Negroes. Negro workers are concentrated in the lowest skilled and lowest paying occupations. These jobs often involve substandard wages, great instability and uncertainty of tenure, extremely low



status in the eyes of both employer and employee, little or no chance for meaningful advancement, and unpleasant and exhausting duties.<sup>26</sup> The high rates of unemployment and underemployment is particularly evident in racial ghettos where most Negroes are forced to live. Concomitant with their unemployment and underemployment is the fact that these people are constantly confronted with the message of discrimination: "You are inferior because of a trait you did not cause and cannot change." This message reinforces feelings of inadequacy arising from repeated failure to obtain and keep decent jobs.<sup>27</sup>

### Occupation and Income

Over the recent decades, Negro Americans have made some progress in the sphere of occupation and income. These gains -- according to Broom and Glenn -- are impressive if viewed in absolute terms.<sup>28</sup> For example, in 1940 only 8.5 per cent of employed Negro workers had white collar or skilled manual occupations, whereas by 1960 almost 20 per cent were employed in such work. The percentage of Negro Americans employed as laborers and domestic service workers fell from 54 per cent in 1940 to 33 per cent in 1960. Unemployment in the non-white labor force also dropped during this period from 16.8 per cent to 8.7 per cent. The median wage and salary income of gainfully employed non-white males rose from \$460 in 1939 to \$3,023 in 1962. In actual buying power in constant (1962) dollars, the increase was threefold -- from \$995 in 1939 to \$3,023 in 1962. The gains, though impressive in absolute terms, appear extremely dwarfed and minimal when looked at in terms of relative deprivation, which refers to what an individual has, not in absolute terms, but in relation to what he aspires to and rightfully expects to attain. In the case of the Negro







American his progress of the last twenty years has caused his aspiration level to go up much faster than his actual gains, even though in some cases these have been dramatic.

The entry of the United States into World War II gave Negro workers a boost in their quest for equality with whites. The drafting of a large number of civilian workers in the Armed Services created an acute labor shortage, and the dearth of qualified white males led to the recruitment of white women and Negroes of both sexes into types of work that previously had been closed to them. However, with the end of the war, the end of Fair Employment Practices Committee in 1946, and with the decline of industries that mainly served the war effort, Negroes suffered tremendous setbacks in occupational status.<sup>29</sup>

The greatest gains for both Negro males and females from 1940-1960 was in the intermediate-level occupations, such as clerical workers, craftsmen, foremen and operatives. There was negligible increase in the representation of Negro males in the highest-level occupations during the two decades. In spite of these gains in the 1940s and 1950s, both males and females in 1960 were far from proportionally represented in all of the white-collar occupational groups and as craftsmen and foremen.<sup>30</sup>

Furthermore, states Broom and Glenn, the recent rate of Negro increase in these occupations is not great enough to lead to occupational equality in the near future.<sup>31</sup> Glenn, in another study, states that at the 1950 to 1960 rates of absolute change, non-whites would attain equality within 93 years from 1960, income equality (in persons) within 219 years, and educational equality within 60 years.<sup>32</sup> He further states that unless discrimination against non-whites suddenly diminishes -- an unlikely development -- they would have to become considerably over-educated before



they can attain occupational and income equality.<sup>33</sup> It should be borne in mind that Glenn's extrapolations basically refer to Negroes who according to data in a special census of Negroes made in 1964 comprised 88 per cent of the 4,289,000 employed non-white males in March, 1964.<sup>34</sup> Further in the 1960 census male Negroes comprised 91 per cent of non-white males of all ages. Thus it is safe to assume that any extrapolations or predictions on data with regard to non-whites basically refer to Negroes.

The situation then, in the sphere of occupation and income for the Negro American, has not been favorable. For those Negroes who did make some headway, their improved occupational and educational status has made keener their perception of their relative disadvantage in relation to their white counterparts. For those who have largely not been affected by even modest gains, there has been an increased sensitivity to their lowly material fortunes and heightened anxieties about their destiny in America.

### Summary

By 1967, whites could point to the demise of slavery, the decline of illiteracy among Negroes, the legal protection provided by the constitutional amendments, civil rights legislation, and the fact that the Negro middle class had grown somewhat.<sup>35</sup> Negroes, however, could point to the doctrine of white supremacy, its widespread acceptance, its influence on the definition of the place of the Negro in American life. They could see progress towards equality, accompanied by bitter resentment. Perhaps most of all, they could feel the persistent, pervasive racism that kept them in inferior segregated schools, restricted them to ghettos, barred them from fair employment, provided double standards in the courts of justice.



In all of this, and in the context of professed ideals, Negroes would find more rejection than acceptance, more retrogression than progress.<sup>36</sup> In other words, the revolution of rising expectations which seemed so dominant a theme in 1954 had been mollified considerably, and severe relative deprivation at the psychological level of the individual Negro has increased.<sup>37</sup> Thomas Pettigrew has summed up the impact of the earlier stages of the revolution in creating relative deprivation among such peoples whom he calls "the other Negro America."

. . . Now constituting perhaps two-thirds of all Negroes, this other Negro America has not as yet been significantly touched by present racial adjustments. Nor has it had any increased contact with white Americans in recent years; rather, it slips further and further into the depths of "the dark ghetto" and its own desperate despair. Its hopes were raised in the 1950's; but now it cannot even rationalize personal failure entirely in racial terms, for EBONY bulges each month with evidence that "the affluent Negro America" is making rapid strides.<sup>38</sup>

Recent changes in race relations in the United States have indeed made the social barriers to achievement seem less impermeable to the ghetto population, especially with the appearance of job training centres etc., in ghetto areas. On the other hand, there are also assertions in the ghetto population about the impossibility of getting anywhere. This has created among the Negroes - especially the "other Negro America" - increasingly ambivalent conceptions about the opportunity structure. Whereas before, their lack of achievement according to American mainstream ideals could easily be explained in terms of impermeable social barriers, now at least there is the feeling that there are ways out of the situation. The lower class Negro continues to be disadvantaged, but his chances of moving up out of the ghetto are probably improving. People do indeed trickle out of the ghetto. This ambivalence has necessitated the need for stating





alternative ideals, and "soul" besides providing solidarity for those with such a need, actually goes a long way towards obliterating this ambivalence by stating alternative ideals.

With this as a background let us now return to examine the Soul phenomenon as a manifestation of group identification in today's ghetto.



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## CHAPTER IV

### SOUL IN THE URBAN BLACK GHETTOS: A MANIFESTATION OF GROUP IDENTIFICATION

Before attempting to examine Soul as a manifestation of group identification let us enumerate some of the main points of this theoretical framework.

First of all group identification is manifested through all the ways in which members of a minority group feel a sense of unity and take positive steps to express this feeling. It is a positive desire to identify oneself as a member of the group and a feeling of pleasure normally accompanies this identification. As a result of group identification members of the group examine current uniqueness in their culture and label them expressions of folk genius. This phenomenon can be promoted in a number of ways. On a very formal level through newspapers, churches, radio, and also through business and politics. On a less formal level through the use of a foreign tongue or even where the English language is used there will be certain words, allusions and topics of conversation that are unique to the minority group and generally understood by those who have had the group experience. How then does Soul meet these criteria? To discover this let us examine three manifestations of Soul -- Soul Language, Soul Music, and Soul Food.

#### Soul Language

The Language of Soul, or, as it might also be called, Spoken Soul or Colored English, is simply an honest vocal portrayal of Black America. The roots of it are more than three hundred years old. Before the Civil



War there were numerous restrictions placed on the speech of slaves. The newly arrived Africans had the problem of learning to speak a new language, but, also, there were inhibitions placed on the topics of the slaves' conversation by the slave masters and overseers. The slaves made up songs to inform one another of, say, the underground railroads' activity. When they sang "Steal Away" they were planning to steal away to the North, not to heaven. Slaves who dared to speak of rebellion or even freedom usually were severely punished. Consequently, Negro slaves were compelled to create a semi-clandestine vernacular in the way that the criminal underworld has historically created words to confound law enforcement agents. It is said that numerous Negro spirituals were inspired by the hardships of slavery, and that what later became songs were initially moanings and coded cotton-field lyrics. To hear these songs sung today by a talented Soul brother or sister, or by a group, is to be reminded of an historical spiritual bond that cannot be satisfactorily described by the mere spoken word.

The American Negro, for virtually all of his history, has constituted a vastly disproportionate number of the country's illiterates. Illiteracy has a way of showing itself in all attempts at vocal expression by the uneducated. With the aid of colloquialisms, malapropisms, battered and fractured grammar and a considerable amount of creativity, the sound of Soul evolved.<sup>1</sup> The progress has been cyclical. Often terms that have been discarded from the Soul people's vocabulary for one reason or another are re-accepted years later, but usually with a completely different meaning.

White Americans often unintentionally wreck the language of Soul, and thus whenever a Soul term becomes popular with whites it is common practice for the Soul folk to drop it. The white folks, it is claimed,



invariably fail to perceive the Soul sound in soulful terms. They get hung up in diction and grammar, and when they vocalize the expression, it is no longer considered soulful.<sup>2</sup> Spoken Soul has a way of coming out metered without the intention of the speaker to invoke it. There are specific phonetic traits. To the Soulless ear the vast majority of these sounds are dismissed as incorrect usage of the English language, and not infrequently, as speech impediments. To the users, however, these are the most communicative and meaningful sounds ever to fall upon human ears: the familiar 'mah' instead of my, 'gonna' for going to, 'yo' for your. 'Ain't' is pronounced 'ain', 'bread' and 'bed', 'bray-ud' and 'bay-ud'; 'baby' is never 'bay-bee' but 'bay-buh.'<sup>3</sup> No matter how many 'man's' you put into your talk, it isn't soulful unless the word has the proper plaintive, nasal 'maee-yun'.<sup>4</sup>

Spoken Soul is distinguished from slang primarily by the fact that the former lends itself easily to conventional English, and the latter is diametrically opposed to adaptations within the realms of conventional English. Police (pronounced 'pō'lice) is a Soul term, whereas 'The Man' is merely slang for the same term.<sup>5</sup> Negroes seldom adopt slang terms from the white world and when they do the terms are usually given a different meaning. Such was the case with the term 'bag' which white racketeers used in the Thirties to refer to the graft that was paid to the police. In Soul language the term refers to a person's vocation, hobby, fancy etc.

Although many non-Negroes use Soul terms yet there are certain classic Soul terms which no matter how often borrowed, remain in the canon and are re-activated ever so often, just as standard jazz tunes are continuously experiencing renaissances. Among the classical expressions are 'solid', 'cool', 'jive' (generally as a noun), 'stuff', 'thing', 'swing'





(or 'swinging'), 'heat', 'busted', 'okee dokee', 'piece', 'sheet' (a jail record) and there are many more.<sup>6</sup> Soul language can be heard in practically all Negro communities throughout the United States, especially in the heart of ghetto land in the large urban cities of the North. For example, on One hundred and twenty-fifth street in New York City (Harlem), on Springfield Avenue in Newark, New Jersey, and dozens of similar locations in many other cities one can hear pure, undiluted spoken Soul as the 'brothers' manifest their group identification.

### Soul Food

One thing is certain: Soul would be nowhere without the Savior, Soul Food. It has been said that Black people brought to the Americas a tradition of how to make good food. Being close to the earth was their nature, and it was not difficult for them to find beans and greens that were good and to make good bread out of corn and crackling. It was essential that they knew this for during slavery the "Man" would work them in the fields from dawn till dusk and invariably they had other chores to perform after work in the fields. Soul Food, then, has its roots in the slavery experience and the African tradition. Its cuisine consists of pigtails, pig knuckles, ham hocks, hog maws, pig ears, snout, chitlins, tripe. A plate of knuckles, black eyes and rice, a thick slice of corn bread, a glass of lemonade and a small homemade sweet potato pie with a mess of chitlins and greens soaked in hot sauce would be about just right for a Soul menu. The watermelon and okra, both African importations, figured prominently among the menu of Blacks in the South. During the great migration most of the food came North when the people did, and today



there are hundreds of tiny restaurants, food shops and rib joints throughout Harlem and other large ghetto areas, that serve "Soul food."<sup>7</sup>

The dishes that are now "Soul food" were once -- and still are to some extent -- referred to simply as "Southern cooking"; but in the Northern ghettos they increasingly come to stand for race rather than region. In the centre of the Washington Negro area, for instance, there is 'Little Harlem Restaurant' advertising "Soul food." Typically, Soul food might have been the poor man's food in the rural South. In the urban North, they may still be to some extent, but in the face of the diversity of the urban environment, they also come to stand as signs of ethnicity.<sup>8</sup> In some Northern cities there are "Soul food" restaurants catering to curious whites, much in the same way as any exotic cuisine. Sometimes the names of "Soul foods" may themselves be used as more or less synonymous with "Soul" -- Negro entertainers on stage, talking of their experiences while journeying between ghetto shows around the country, sometimes refer to it as the "chitterlin circuit", and this figure of speech usually draws much favorable audience reaction.<sup>9</sup> The major point is that Soul food has come to stand as a sign of ethnicity and a manifestation of group identification.

### Soul Music

Another area of widespread Soul symbolism is that of Music. It emanates from the rumble of gospel chords and the plaintive cry of the blues. It is compounded of raw emotion, pulsing rhythm and spare, earthy lyrics -- all suffused with the sensual, somewhat melancholy vibrations of the Negro idiom. Always the Negro idiom. Le Roi Jones the militant Negro playwright says: "Soul music is music coming out of the black spirit."

Negroes have been sifting their sorrows in songs for centuries.



It started with the groans and moans of the people in the cotton fields. Before it got the name Soul, men were selling watermelons and vegetables on a wagon drawn by a mule, hollering "watermeelon!" with a cry in their voices. And the man on the railroad track laying crossties -- every time they put the hammer it was with a sad feeling but with a beat. The Baptist preacher could be thought of as having Soul as he gave out the meter, a long and short meter, and the old mothers of the church would reply.

Out of the matrix of these Negro work songs, field hollers and spirituals of the 19th Century, sprang the first crude country blues which was spread by bardic singers with guitars or harmonicas. With the Negro migration to Northern cities in the early part of the 20th Century, the blues started to move into theatres, dance halls and recording studios. This was the era of Bessie Smith's classic records. By the 1930's a different style was created around tenements, speakeasies and rent parties -- a harsher, more nervous brand of blues that reflected the stress and strains of urban living. It was during this era also that the stage was set for the emergence of rhythm and blues. Rhythm and blues was even more frenetic than urban blues, and it introduced amplified guitars, honking saxophones and grating singers in lamé costumes. Rhythm and blues was soon lifted by white pop singers like Elvis Presley and Bill Haley and performed as rock 'n roll. In those days, the only way for Negroes to really make it in the white world was to do what the Nat King Coles and the Lena Hornes did: forsake their own music and sing white pop.

Negroes had always maintained a distinction between gospel and blues -- the sacred and profane -- despite the affinity of their sounds. Ray Charles, one of the most versatile singers in the history of pop





music, boldly brought the gospel and blues together blending footstomping orgiastic jubilation shouts with the abrasive, existentialist irony of "devil songs". He even carried over the original gospel tunes and changed the words to fit the emotion. "Lord" became "you" or "baby" and it didn't matter if the bulk of the prayerful text remained the same. Once Charles broke the barrier between gospel and blues, the way was open for a whole cluster of ingredients to converge around a rhythm and blues core and form the potent, musical mix now known as Soul.

Soul has moved into the white market of pop music and black Soul singers like James Brown, Lou Rauls, Aretha Franklin, to mention a few, are selling millions of records. Before this started happening, Soul music was recorded mostly by small, independent companies and shipped straight to the South's black belt and the North's big-city ghettos. Now the upsurge of nationwide Soul-oriented firms is so strong that it has jostled the balance of power in the pop record industry. Manhattan based Atlantic, with such singers as Aretha Franklin, Sam and Dave, and Wilson Pickett can now sell more records in a week (1,300,000) than it did in six months in 1950.<sup>10</sup>

Whatever yardsticks one chooses to use one fact is obvious: Soul has arrived, and in a significant manner. Since its tortuous evolution is so intertwined with Negro history and so expressive of Negro culture, most Negroes naturally tend to value it as a sort of badge of black identity. Thus Soul music, I would contend, is another manifestation of group identification in that it emphasizes and glorifies the black tradition (Negritude) in all its manifestations.



### Business and Politics

In business and politics Soul is almost entirely synonymous with Black. Business has been quick to catch on to this trend, and quite a few have become black oriented. The toy industry is one example of this. Leading educators have repeatedly held that play is as important to a child as work is to an adult, for it helps him develop early concepts about himself, his family, and other people. Black parents were beginning to question whether the toys they bought contributed to their children's physical, emotional, intellectual and social growth, or whether they were stunting development by implying that only white is beautiful and legitimate in portrayals of human beings. Christmas 1968, saw the advent of "Soul toys" -- an important and welcome breakthrough -- primarily because manufacturers are discovering that there is a great untapped market for black oriented toys.<sup>11</sup> That an "integrated" toy industry may help Negro children develop a sense of identity and racial pride is of fringe concern to businessmen, but of major importance to parents sensitive to positive black consciousness. In many other sectors of the business world for those who want to "buy black" in every sense of the word, there are many stores specializing in Afro-American art and crafts. Many large departmental stores, Macy's and Gimbels, to mention two large New York departmental stores, have sections which sell dashikis and other Soul apparel.

The commercial side of Negro entertainment is tied to Soul music. In Washington, local disc jockeys, such as "The Nighthawk: (Bob Terry) and 'Soul Finger' (Fred Correy) make highly appreciated appearances at the Howard theatre in Washington. Their station is WOL 'Soul Radio'. In New York there is a WWRL "Soul Brother Radio" and Frankie Crocker (Agent 007 Soul Brother) makes frequent appearances at the famed Harlem's Apollo



theatre.

It is clear that commercial establishments with a vested interest in a separate Negro audience have seized upon the "Soul" phenomenon and are using it to further their own interests. However "Soul" is definitely not merely a commercial innovation. It existed among Negroes before it was commercialized, and the fact that it seems so profitable for commercial establishments to utilize the banner of 'Soul' indicates that whatever part these establishments have had in promoting Soul, it has fallen into fertile ground.

In the field of politics the Soul phenomenon has again been in vogue. Negro politicians such as Adam Clayton Powell, Carl Stokes and Richard Hatcher -- to mention a few -- have utilized the Soul brother slogan and won handsomely by capturing the black vote in their respective constituencies. The election of Stokes and Hatcher as black mayors of two large U.S.A. cities is especially significant for they secured some ninety-five per cent of the Negro vote and they were made mayors, not by the few whites who voted for them, but by the many Negroes who registered and cast their votes.

### Summary and Conclusions

What then, is the relationship between Soul and group identification? Group identification is defined as all the ways in which members of a group feel a sense of unity and express same. Negroes -- especially lower class ones -- are expressing this through Soul as manifested in music, language and food. The Soul phenomenon, like group identification, is promoted through the formal level by way of such channels as radio, television (the numerous Soul stations on radio and television) and also





through business and politics. On the less formal level the use of Soul language as a foreign tongue and Soul food as an exotic cuisine, all seem to bolster my thesis that Soul as a phenomenon among Negroes can be viewed in the light of group identification and can be analyzed as a manifestation of same.

There are, however, certain drawbacks that should be noted. There is not enough evidence -- documentary or otherwise -- to assume that the Soul phenomenon is indicative of a total black solidarity existing everywhere and throughout the Negro communities in the U.S.A. Indeed, its use is widespread among Negroes and Whites, but as a potent base for identity and solidarity the evidence indicates that it is more widespread among lower class Negroes.<sup>12</sup> This, I feel, is basically because the American society as it passes through the various phases of a social revolution, is forcing basic cultural adjustments on the parts of Negroes and whites. The "other Negro America" -- the black masses -- still find themselves in the ghetto and at the bottom of the socio-economic heap, hence the use of Soul to bolster their self-image and to create greater solidarity among themselves. Today, lower class Negroes continue to follow the pattern of slavery times. By appearing to accept the ethnic stereotypes that are intended to depreciate them, they turn these stereotypes to their own group purpose. During slavery patois - although functional in that it aided conspiracies and escapes - branded its user with a badge of inferiority. Today in Soul language, the black man puts the patois to his use and uses it as a secret language to communicate the hostility of blacks for whites, and great delight is taken by blacks when whites are confounded by the language.<sup>13</sup> The idea that Negroes have natural rhythm was originally used by whites to depreciate any musical creativity observed by blacks. Today



most black people have embraced this stereotype and elaborated it into the creation of a singular music which most whites cannot create, play, nor fully comprehend -- Soul music. Thus the patois and other demeaning attributes are being turned -- especially by lower class Negroes to a positive and elevating use, one that from a cultural perspective, can fully bind black people together with a sense of identity and group solidarity.

Blackness and powerlessness seem to be the two main variables which have influenced the lot of the Negro in America. Stokely Carmichael puts the same argument this way:

There have been traditionally two communities in America, the white community, which controlled and defined the forms that all institutions within the society would take; and the Negro community, which has been excluded from participation in the power decisions that shaped the society, and has traditionally been dependent upon, and subservient to the white community . . . This fact cannot be too strongly emphasized -- that racist assumptions of white superiority have been so deeply ingrained in the structure of the society that it infuses its entire functioning, and is so much a part of the national subconscious that it is taken for granted and is frequently not recognized.<sup>14</sup>

The National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, and various other studies have essentially made the same argument, although in less forceful terms. Soul and manifestations of cultural nationalism attempt to cater to the condition of blackness. The condition of powerlessness can only be dealt with when the transition is made from cultural to political nationalism; that is when most Negroes move further from the idea of "Blackness" to an understanding of White Power (the American political and economic system) and organize to change it so that they can get power.

Finally, one may ask whether Soul or anything similar to it can be found in other areas of large black populations in the world. To this the answer is an emphatic yes. The concept of Negritude -- which emanated



in the Caribbean and then moved to Africa -- has many similarities to the Soul phenomenon. Like Soul, it is thought to be a distinct quality to Negroness, growing out of the Negro experience in the Caribbean and Africa. The experience of slavery and exploitation; the experience of being black and powerless. To get a better perspective of the similarities of the two phenomena let us examine the concept of Negritude, especially as it is manifested in its Caribbean environment.





Footnotes

1. Claude Brown, "The Language of Soul", Esquire, April, 1968, p. 88.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., p. 160.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid., p. 162.
7. Le Roi Jones, "Soul Food", Home-Social Essays. William Morrow & Co., Inc., New York, 1966. p. 103.
8. Ulf Hannerz, "The Rhetoric of Soul: Identification in Negro Society." Race, IX, 4, 1968. p. 456.
9. Ibid., p. 457.
10. "Lady Soul: Singing it Like It is", Time, Canadian Edition, June 28, 1968. p. 47.
11. "The Advent of Soul Toys", Ebony, A. Johnson Publication, November, 1968. p. 165.
12. Hannerz, op. cit., pp. 453-465 also Brown op. cit., pp. 79-88.
13. W. H. Grier, P. M. Cobbs, Black Rage. Bantam Books, Inc., New York, 1969. p. 106.
14. S. Carmichael, "Towards Black Liberation," in Black Fire, an Anthology of Afro-American Writing, L. Jones and L. Neal eds., William Morrow & Co. Inc., New York 1968. p. 123.



## CHAPTER V

## SOUL IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE:

## NEGRITUDE IN THE CARIBBEAN

Early History

Before one can discuss the concept of 'Negritude' and attempt to point out similarities with the concept of 'Soul', one must first give a brief sketch of the early history of the Caribbean area.

When I think of the Caribbean I have in mind a canvas larger than that usually found in the gallery of the colonial mind. The area of the Caribbean is always difficult to define. Should it be viewed from that of the majority of Frenchmen for whom the word Antilles primarily means the group made up of Martinique, Gaudeloupe and French Guiana? Or should we join the British who customarily think in terms of the British or former British West Indies? Or should we take the Dutch viewpoint and see no further than Curacao and Surinam, or maybe the American viewpoint that equates the Caribbean as amounting chiefly to Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands? Actually the Caribbean can be viewed from a two-fold perspective -- the Caribbean proper and what might be termed the "greater Caribbean". The Caribbean proper includes the Greater Antilles, except Cuba, the lesser Antilles and the Guianas. The greater Caribbean includes the Bahamas, Belize and the countries of Central America, Columbia and Venezuela. I shall be more concerned with the former -- the Caribbean proper -- save for the inclusion of Cuba and Belize.

The Economics of nations were swayed by the Caribbean sugar plantations. As Eric Williams pointed out in The Negro in the Caribbean (1942), the small island of French Gaudeloupe was once considered more



valuable than all Canada and the Dutch gladly exchanged what is now New York State for a strip of Guiana. This necklace of islands that surrounds the Caribbean Sea to the South American territories of Guyana and British Honduras, do indeed have an interesting history.

Columbus opened the West Indies to Europe by his voyage of discovery of 1492 to 1501, and governments and commercial companies were quick to encourage the settlement of an area that promised to be as profitable as the remoter Indies of the East. The settlers exterminated the aboriginal Arawaks and decimated the Caribs. In the 17th Century the territories became pawns in the power struggles of Europe, and repeated invasions were made more devastating by the use of pirates and buccaneers instead of troops. By the end of the 17th Century this phase had passed, leaving in its trail a tradition of violence that permeated Caribbean life. The following years saw the rise of the 'plantocracy' that came to power on the wealth of the slave-owning sugar estates, and this was to remain the central force in Caribbean society until the emancipation of the slaves.

The great proportion of West Indian inhabitants were, of course, the slaves. During the 18th Century, nearly two million were imported from Africa into the English-speaking Caribbean alone. Unable to look back at their homelands -- except with sorrow and grief -- they were forced to evolve Caribbean ways of life. As this made a basis for united revolt, the slave owners did everything they could to prevent group consciousness from forming. Slaves were usually separated from their fellows who came from the same region of Africa. Many of the slaves were not allowed to marry. Most cultural activities were denied the slaves, unless of course they were work songs which helped increase productivity. The





slaves were flogged, mutilated, and sometimes burnt, at times to punish them and at other times to demoralize them. The attitude held towards the slaves is epitomized in the intense opposition of slave-owners to the activities of missionaries. If a slave was baptized it would have been a tacit admission that he was a fellow human being and that he held claims on the owner's conscience. In the 19th Century came emancipation, but by then the slaves had to bear the profound psychic wounds of slavery and the temptations towards self-contempt. Further they had to face the already entrenched freed mulattoes and Europeanized middle-class who, in most cases, were hostile to them.

The situation was further complicated by the large importation of Indian and Chinese workers, especially to Trinidad and Guyana. This was done to help replace the loss of labor resulting from the emancipation of slavery. These new imports arrived on the Caribbean scene relatively late and were not deprived by slavery of their cultural modes and customs. Yet, however, one does not find many of Indian or Chinese descent returning to their native lands, they have to a large extent tried to create a new West Indian or Caribbean way of life.<sup>1</sup>

#### Early Resistance: African Religion

Despite the past of wretchedness and despair, of brutality and exploitation, many of the slaves desperately resisted European domination. The first manifestation of this resistance was basically religious. Subjected to forced labor and deprived of all freedom of movement, their family life utterly dislocated, the slaves had no way of preserving their former way of life save its religious customs and beliefs.<sup>2</sup> Hence nothing managed to survive but these cultural elements of African source which,



at least at the outset, seemed not to interfere with the rules of life or of work imposed upon the captive slaves. The slaves organized themselves in secret societies, and at night, met in the forest's depths to celebrate their ancient ancestral rites. The San Domingo uprising was begun by a ceremony of this sort; voodoo worship was the trigger and mainstay of the Haitian revolution.<sup>3</sup>

Today, depending on the particular island, those traditions still exist in varying degrees in the Caribbean. Michel also points out that in Martinique and Guadeloupe, they exist in something of a state of pulverization, while in Haiti they are much more intact.<sup>4</sup> Alfred Metraux's view is that the Cuban Negroes, whose circumstances and outlook are closer to what they were in the time of slavery, have more faithfully preserved them than have the Haitians.<sup>5</sup> While the degrees may vary, there is no doubt but that, under different names and forms, these old traditions have been maintained throughout the Caribbean. In Haiti, there are the voodoo rites inherited from African tribes; in Trinidad, there is 'Shango' worship and the various protestant 'Shaker' sects; in Jamaica there are also the religious practices which the Spanish called 'Pocomania'. The fact remains that in the very teeth of white oppression, African religion was the earliest manifestation of the Caribbean people's racial consciousness. Let us now examine how this racial consciousness laid the groundwork for an indigenous culture as well as a militant one.

### Attempts at Obliterating the 'Inferiority Complex'

It is one of the most moving witnesses to the resilience of man's spirit that, after the appalling slave ship 'middle passage' from Africa to the West Indies, and amid the continual dehumanization of plantation



life, a culture did emerge among the Negro population of the Caribbean. In certain ways it was a continuation of African culture. In the Caribbean, watching the kerchiefed market women lay out pyramids of fruit and vegetables on their mats, a peasant woman combing her daughter's hair into elaborate plaits, or tasting a country dish, one feels one could be in West Africa.<sup>6</sup> African religious rites continue somewhat modified, in Haitian voodoo in Shango in Trinidad and Pocomania in Jamaica, while African words and syntax form an important element in all Caribbean dialects. But this adherence to an African past was not always very strong. As a matter of fact, one of the sequels of slavery was that the Negro in the Caribbean had a ruinous inferiority complex and experienced a thinly concealed discomfort, or even a feeling of shame, whenever the subject of their distant past was raised. Responsibility for this attitude of mind, stated the Haitian sociologist Jean Price-Mars, lay with those artisans of black servitude who once persuaded Negroes that they were the discarded trash of mankind, without a history, without ethics, without a religion.<sup>7</sup> The liquidation of this inferiority complex became the theme of many Caribbean artists, statesmen and scholars.

To restore the Negro's confidence in himself and in his destiny, he had to be convinced of his mistake in feeling ashamed of his African lineage. In his native Jamaica from 1914 to 1916, then towards 1920 in the United States, Marcus Garvey was the first to preach the 'back to Africa' message and the glorification of blackness. This message had a tremendous effect in the then British West Indies as in the United States of America, and today is far from completely dead. In Haiti, Jean Price-Mars was drawing his audience's attention to the superb civilization which had flourished on the dark continent, and declaring that Negroes stood no





chance of becoming their true selves unless they acknowledged every part of their ancestral heritage, the greatest part of which happened to be African.<sup>8</sup>

The task of helping the inhabitants of the Caribbean rediscover their own soil, their roots in it, and ultimately themselves in the manifold vestiges of African civilization which had lain neglected or been despised, was accepted by a number of intellectuals. Some of them were black West Indians -- like the Haitians Price-Mars, Jacques Romain, Milo Rigaud and the Cuban Nicolas Guillen -- others white -- like Melville Herskovits, Michel Leris, Alfred Métraux and the Cuban Emilio Ballagas. This they did despite the keenest distaste which the Europeanized middle-class had for their efforts.<sup>9</sup>

The inhabitants of the Caribbean were also exhorted to take an interest in the history of their region. Eric Williams, (who, before becoming Chief Minister of Trinidad, was preparing a Caribbean history covering the period 1492-1955) has, in numerous articles and lectures, evoked Caribbean figures of the past and published historical documents. The Caribbean Historical Review is concerned with these matters. Diaz Solar of Puerto Rico has published a book dealing with the abolition of slavery in his island; to R. van Lier, of Surinam, we owe an historical study of that territory; to Fernando Ortiz, a brilliant work on Cuba's economic past.<sup>10</sup>

The Caribbean Negro was also prodded to be proud of his color and physique, and to be convinced that his black skin is handsome and desirable. Mrs. Edna Manley (wife of Jamaica's former chief minister) has succeeded in persuading an entire school of young painters that Negro art is neither 'ugly' nor 'primitive' in the sense of unsophisticated, and that there



exists a Negro beauty which is worthy of representation by the painter's brush and the sculptor's chisel. Today, guided by her example, Jamaican painters have stopped doing tame imitations of European work and are endeavouring to re-interpret it in Caribbean terms, selecting subjects and models from their own lands.<sup>11</sup> In Martinique a similar renaissance is being witnessed in the plastic arts, and in Trinidad the folk theatre of Beryl McBurnie stands as another example.<sup>12</sup>

The inferiority complex also extended to the matter of spoken language. The Caribbean populations speak several patois and as everyone knows, Creole is the one in greatest currency. This mixture of French and of dialects whose origins can be traced back to Western Africa, besprinkled with words drawn from English and Spanish, is a somewhat rudimentary tongue. It is however one which is full of charm.<sup>13</sup> Although there is as yet no evidence of an attempt to banish metropolitan languages from the schools and teach nothing but Creole, yet the use and study of Creole is spreading in Jamaica, British Honduras, Guyana, and the French territories of Guadeloupe and Martinique -- to mention a few. The Caribbean intellectual elite is becoming steadily more aware of the great services Creole may yet have to render as a meeting ground upon which to make touch with the people, and as an instrument to facilitate contacts between various Creole-speaking islands.<sup>14</sup>

In various ways the inhabitants of the Caribbean gradually, but surely, tried to liquidate the traces of inferiority complex. With the short historical sketch as a background, let us now examine the concept of Negritude.



### The Concept of Négritude

The term Négritude appeared for the first time in print in a long poem by the Martinician, Aimé Césaire, in Cahier d'un retour au pays Natal (Paris, 1947). Subsequently, the term has come into common use in the discussion of neo-African literature and art, and the concept has also been analyzed by such writers as Jean Paul Sartre in his L'Orphee Noir, and more recently by Janheinz Jahn in Muntri.<sup>15</sup>

Perhaps before going into details it might be useful to give a general definition of the various stages of 'Negritude', all of which are clearly connected. Coulthard posits seven stages and they are:

- 1) the revaluation of African culture i.e. the Negro slave did not arrive in America as a complete savage with no cultural past.
- 2) the rejection of ideas of racial inequality and of the unadaptability of the Negro to Western civilization.
- 3) a protest against racial prejudice and discrimination.
- 4) the recognition of the West Indies as linked with Africa through African folklore (music, dancing, religious attitudes and practices such as voodoo).
- 5) a critical reassessment of the desirability of West European cultural values, which had previously been taken for granted as a superior way of life. This went hand in hand with the revaluation of African features in West Indian life, such as voodoo, style of dancing, music etc., previously regarded as inferior, indeed something to be ashamed of and denied.
- 6) the proclamation of a distinctive Negro attitude to life, an African or Negro sensibility, particularly noticeable in the arts.





7) and finally, it should be stressed that this general build-up to Negritude and the final elaboration of the concept of Negritude took place largely in the West Indies.<sup>16</sup>

The first and very important ground-clearing was largely the work of Haitians, which was perhaps understandable, as Haiti was the first independent black republic in America. Moreover the Haitians, as black men of African slave origin living in a white world, had to adopt a tenable position.<sup>17</sup> Jean Price-Mars and Firmin opened the flood gates of the Africanization of Haitian art and life by writing works which emphasized the rejection of racial inferiority, the acceptance of a native cultural past and a suggestion that it should be included in the mainstream of Haitian culture, the encouragement to writers and artists to look at the true (Afro-French) situation in Haiti, and finally the criticism of the distortion of Haitian cultural life by the snobbish prejudiced worship of European models.<sup>18</sup>

But this trend was not peculiar to Haiti, the literature of the other Caribbean islands, whether in Spanish, French or English, had as its dominant theme the rejection of European culture in favor of African values. The Jamaicans George Campbell and Claude McKay, the Cuban Nicolás Guillén, the Puerto Rican Luis Pales Matos and others were in the vanguard of this movement.<sup>19</sup>

What Césaire did achieve was a much more clear-cut formulation of what had gone before, plus a new dimension i.e. 'negritude': the statement of a distinctive Negro feeling of the world out of which a new conception of art and life could spring. In his Discours sur le Colonialisme, he achieved, in precise incisive terms, a definition of the functioning of



colonialism and a powerfully emotionally charged intellectual rejection of European claims to exclusive cultural superiority.<sup>20</sup>

Negritude, then, as a concept can be said to be a formulation of a Negro attitude to life and art. It consists of the Negro's revolt against the position of inferiority assigned to him; against his economic exploitation. It is a criticism and rejection of 'white' values, and the propounding of an attitude to life and a way of apprehending reality, which are quite different (the difference is constantly stressed) and specifically Negro, and which belongs to Negroes the world over.<sup>21</sup> The approach to life through Negritude is felt to be somehow richer, more natural, and there is the suggestion that white civilization has gone wrong and has taken, from a human point of view, a wrong turning into excessive materialism, pragmatism and technomania.<sup>22</sup>

One may then ask what has Negritude effectively produced? It has produced first of all a more thorough, balanced and unbiassed appraisal of African cultural elements in the Africanised or partially Africanised parts of the West Indies (including Panama, the coastal areas of Columbia, Venezuela and Ecuador). Second, it produced an undermining of the suffocating prestige of European, Christian and humanistic values, which some have attempted to replace by African values. Third, it has produced an added self-assurance in the Negro in the knowledge that he has a civilized past of his own, and that its survivals in America (voodoo, dancing, singing, folklore) are in no way intrinsically inferior to what Europe has produced. Fourth, a more profound and subtle understanding of himself (Negro) and his psychology in terms of conflicting colonial and African constituents. Finally, it has produced a loss of the shame which had been directly or indirectly inculcated into him (the Negro) through his



European-type education. All these things, Coulthard states, are stimulated or activated by Negritude in varying proportions.<sup>23</sup> This concept of Negritude, not just as a cultural vindication of people of African descent and a critique of the theory and practice of colonialism, but as a particular kind of Negro awareness, has found wide acceptance. This is particularly as far as music and dancing are concerned, in Jamaica, Haiti, Trinidad and to some extent in Puerto Rico and Cuba.<sup>24</sup>

But Negritude had another far reaching effect. It motivated a rising social consciousness that eventually led to growing political activity which culminated in independence or near independence for nation-states in the Caribbean. As formerly in Europe, the initial spark was given to this movement for political nationalism, by a fraction of the middle-class which detached itself from the rest of the bourgeoisie in order to make common cause with the people. Also, as a fraction of the half-caste upper layer was descending towards the people, a petty black bourgeoisie was starting to rise and acquire the means whereby it could give its children a university education. In time, from their ranks emerged a handful of dark-skinned intellectuals, all impatient to put an end to a social regime which insulted and ridiculed men of their color.<sup>25</sup>

At the very beginning the movement did not place the accent upon fighting for specifically working class ends. It was originally the creation of some trail-blazers who had come from the middle-class: men like Boisneuf in Guadeloupe, Captain Cipriani in Trinidad, Marryshaw in Grenada, Juan Gualberto Gomez in Cuba etc., and its program reflected the interests and aspirations of the petty bourgeoisie more than the needs of the workers. This was soon to undergo a radical change.<sup>26</sup> Around 1935-38 in the British West Indies, 1940 in Puerto Rico, around 1944 in the French Antilles,







1946 in Haiti, a new kind of movement was born. This movement was no longer middle-class oriented or dominated, but was one in which the working-class was in the vanguard.<sup>27</sup> In some countries the movement was reformist in nature, in others revolutionary, but everywhere the aim was the same, a common revolt against the supremacy of the white sugar planters.<sup>28</sup>

In the British Caribbean, Moskos states emphatically that the political independence movements were an outcome of the economic discontent of the depressed masses of West Indian society, and this was largely directed into the support of nationalist movements. To achieve political independence grass-root organisations were formed, and alliances with labor unions were made. Thus, with middle-class leadership at first and later with lower-class support and ultimately with cultural endeavors (cultural nationalism), it became possible for a social movement to arise which was able to transform older notions of the legitimacy of the imperial order into a belief in the sovereignty of the West Indian people.<sup>29</sup>

### Negritude and Soul

In trying to compare these two phenomena one similarity stands out clearly, and that is the fact that both have tried to counteract the malignant and demeaning image of the blackness of the Negro in the New World -- whether it be in the Caribbean or in the United States of America. In both the Caribbean and in the United States of America the slaves were virtually stripped of their culture, and were taught to hold contempt for their blackness and their African past. The Soul phenomenon in the States, when it tries through music, language, food etc. to emancipate the Negro by freeing him from white symbols and images, when it uses the slavery past and the African tradition to build group solidarity, it is catering



to the positive aspect of Blackness as much as Negritude does. The Soul phenomenon and Negritude can both be seen as Negro revolts against the position of inferiority assigned to him.

There is one crucial difference, however, and that is seen when we consider the question of power. Whereas in the Caribbean the forces of Negritude and the concomitant cultural nationalism were used to form mass social movements and set the stage for ultimate political and near political independence in most Caribbean countries, one has yet to see this movement from cultural to political nationalism in the United States. This difference is indeed crucial, for it shows that the question of power has yet to be dealt with effectively by the Negro minority in the States.

The Negro in the Caribbean, although a numerical majority, was, in terms of holding power, as much a sociological minority as are Negroes in the States. Among both minorities one found an antagonistic middle-class who collaborated instead of protested; among both minorities are found the small fraction of the middle-class which detached itself from the rest of the bourgeoisie to make common cause with the people; but there the analogy ends. Why is it that in one instance the middle-class elite, who had deserted their class to inspire the black masses, were able to unite and combine their resources and form the backbone of social emancipation movements which led to independence? And why in other instance this movement from inspiration to unity and ultimate independence has not been achieved? The answer to this probing question lies beyond the modest scope of this thesis. I would, however, venture to suggest that one possible avenue of explanation might lie in the greater intransigence of the political system under which the Negro minority in the United States has been forced to operate.



### Footnotes

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2. Daniel Guerin, The West Indies and Their Future, London: Dennis Dobson, 1961. p. 84.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., p. 85.
5. Ibid.
6. James, op. cit., p. 11.
7. Guerin, op. cit., p. 91.
8. Ibid., p. 92.
9. Ibid., p. 93.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid., p. 95.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid., p. 96.
14. Ibid., p. 100.
15. G. R. Coulthard, Race and Colour in Caribbean Literature, London: Oxford University Press, 1962. p. 58.
16. G. R. Coulthard, "Parallelisms and Divergencies between Negritude and Indigenismo," Caribbean Studies, Vol. 8, No. 1, April 1968. p. 46.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid., p. 49
19. Coulthard, Race and Colour, op. cit., chapter 11.





20. Coulthard, Parallelisms and Divergencies between Negritude and Indigenismo, op. cit., p. 50.
21. Coulthard, Race and Colour, op. cit., p. 60.
22. Ibid., p. 61.
23. Coulthard, Parallelisms and Divergencies between Negritude, op. cit., pp. 52-53.
24. Ibid., p. 54.
25. Guerin, op. cit., p. 108.
26. Ibid., p. 109.
27. Ibid., p. 110.
28. Ibid.
29. C. Moskos, The Sociology of Political Independence: A Study of Nationalist Attitudes Among West Indian Leaders, Schenkman Publishing Co, Inc., Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1967. p. 62.  
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## CHAPTER VI

## SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

Soul as a concept in philosophy, theology and psychology, to mention a few, often referred to what is known as the 'vitalizing principle', the process by which the vital operations of living are performed. The concept as currently used -- first in the Negro ghettos and subsequently throughout the Black community -- ascribed the "essentially human" to what is "essentially Negro". The connotation of "the essentially human" to refer to "the essentially Negro" as the new concept of Soul does, has indeed an ethnocentric emphasis. Soul Music, Soul Food and Soul Language -- the prime manifestations of Soul -- not only attest to this theme but they also tend to give Negroes (especially lower class Negroes) a positive badge of black identity. The whole Soul syndrome, then, can be viewed as a glorification of Negritude in all its manifestations.

Soul in its current usage is an attempt to minister to the need for solidarity and identity among Negroes. As such it is not a unique phenomenon but rather part of what is known as group identification, a phenomenon that appeared at various periods throughout Negro history in the U.S.A.

It should, however, be borne in mind that Soul is a minority response to a dominant majority orientation. Soul, it must be remembered, first emerged in the mid-fifties when the promises and optimism of the "Second Reconstruction" initiated by the pattern of litigation which resulted in the Brown decision of 1954, swelled the hopes and beliefs of the Negro. Most Negroes then felt that equality and democracy could be achieved through litigation, legislation and negotiation, and finally



strong executive action. Soul emerging in this context could be viewed as a pluralistic response comprised of positive self-pride and pluralistic co-existence with the majority. As the '60's' came along the Negro masses -- most of whom dwell in the ghettos -- found that like in times past they were not receiving any concrete benefits from the social revolution which the '50's' were supposed to have ushered in. Far from it, they still remained at the bottom of the socio-economic heap. Thus, Soul came to portray a more social activist (militant) trend -- rather than the rhetoric of esteem which characterised it in the early '50's' -- perhaps as a complex response to the 'traditional' efforts of the civil rights movement and the intransigent racist orientation of the dominant white majority. The Soul phenomenon is more widespread among lower-class Negroes and this is basically because the bifurcation of the Negro caste and the emergence and growth of the Negro middle-class has caused the Negro masses to redefine themselves, not only in terms of whites, but also in relation to the "new class." This has led the masses to rely more on Soul to bolster their self-image and to create greater solidarity among themselves.

The Soul phenomenon insofar as it counteracts the demeaning images of blackness is similar to the concept of Negritude which served basically the same purposes in the Caribbean. There is one crucial difference, however, and that is that the concept of Negritude was used in the Caribbean to precipitate social emancipation movements which led to independence for many states; the concept of Soul has not yet dealt with this vital problem of the powerlessness of the American Negro. This transition from cultural nationalism to political nationalism in the United States among American Negroes, I would predict, can and will come about when the Negro leadership becomes less fragmented and when centralised leadership and





organisation unites the 'Black Bourgeoisie' with the 'other Negro America', and challenges the viability of the structures in which power resides in the society. Of course, an easier way would be a change of orientation of the majority group, however the racial basis of the political system in the United States and the intransigence of the dominant majority so far, makes this seem well nigh impossible. As Frederick Douglass once said: "The whole history of the progress of human liberty shows that all concessions yet made to her august claims, have been borne of earnest struggle. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will."<sup>1</sup>

The evidence presented in this thesis indicates the existence -- in the form of Soul -- of a definite trend towards ethnocentrism among American Negroes. This trend is the product of the caste pressures to which the Negro is subjected. There is the consciousness of a common suffering in the past and present. There is the consciousness also of a past of achievement, and in many there is some hope of a wonderful future destiny as a racial group; these form not only a basis for group solidarity, but a psychological escape from prejudice and discrimination -- as is true of oppressed minorities the world over.

There has been very little theoretical work done on this new connotation of the concept Soul.<sup>2</sup> My interpretation of Soul in the light of the theoretical framework of group identification seems quite similar to the conceptual framework "consciousness of kind" which Shibutani and Kwan have defined as a phenomenon involving some sort of sympathetic identification with others in the same category.<sup>3</sup> Both these phenomena -- consciousness of kind and group identification -- lead to an enhancement of group solidarity. It only remains now for a more thorough and comprehensive investigation into the many facets of this new usage of Soul, especially



into the extent to which group solidarity has been enhanced in the Negro community.

In conclusion it should be stressed that the writer sees two very potent practical implications arising from the theoretical emphasis and interpretation given in this study. In the Caucasian - dominated culture of the Western World, color symbolism has invariably served to re-inforce the assumptions that whiteness connotes virtue and purity, while blackness connotes wickedness (sin) and defilement. One result of this is that black populations in the world have confronted this color symbolism of the white world and are gradually but forcibly rejecting it. As I have shown earlier, this rejection has found expression in the concepts of "Negritude" in the Caribbean and "Soul" and "Black Power" in the U.S.A. This rejection of Western values and the growing consciousness of group identification have, in turn, stimulated the movement toward self-determination and self-government in the Caribbean. Meanwhile Soul in the U.S.A., intent on the glorification of blackness, looks toward the achievement of economic and political power based on group identification, loyalty and solidarity. The two practical implications of this study then, are (1) that it highlights among Negroes the importance of group identification and solidarity - as evidenced in "Soul" - as a lever toward effecting political change, and (2) that it sensitizes the non-Negro to the Negro's quest for 'human' status, while simultaneously presenting a more positive 'world view' of Afro-Americans.



Footnotes

1. L. Bennett, Jr., *Pioneers in Protest*, Johnson Publishing Co. Inc., Chicago, 1968. p. 198.
2. Hannerz, Kiel and Jones (works cited in earlier chapters along with John F. Szwed, "Musical Style and Racial Conflict", Phylon (Vol, 27, 1966). pp. 358-66, are about the main analyzers of Soul from a theoretical standpoint.
3. T. Shibutani and K. Kwan, Ethnic Stratification: A Comparative Approach. Macmillan Co., New York, 1965. p. 42.





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